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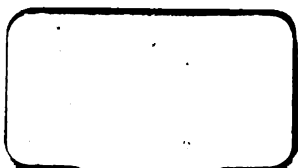
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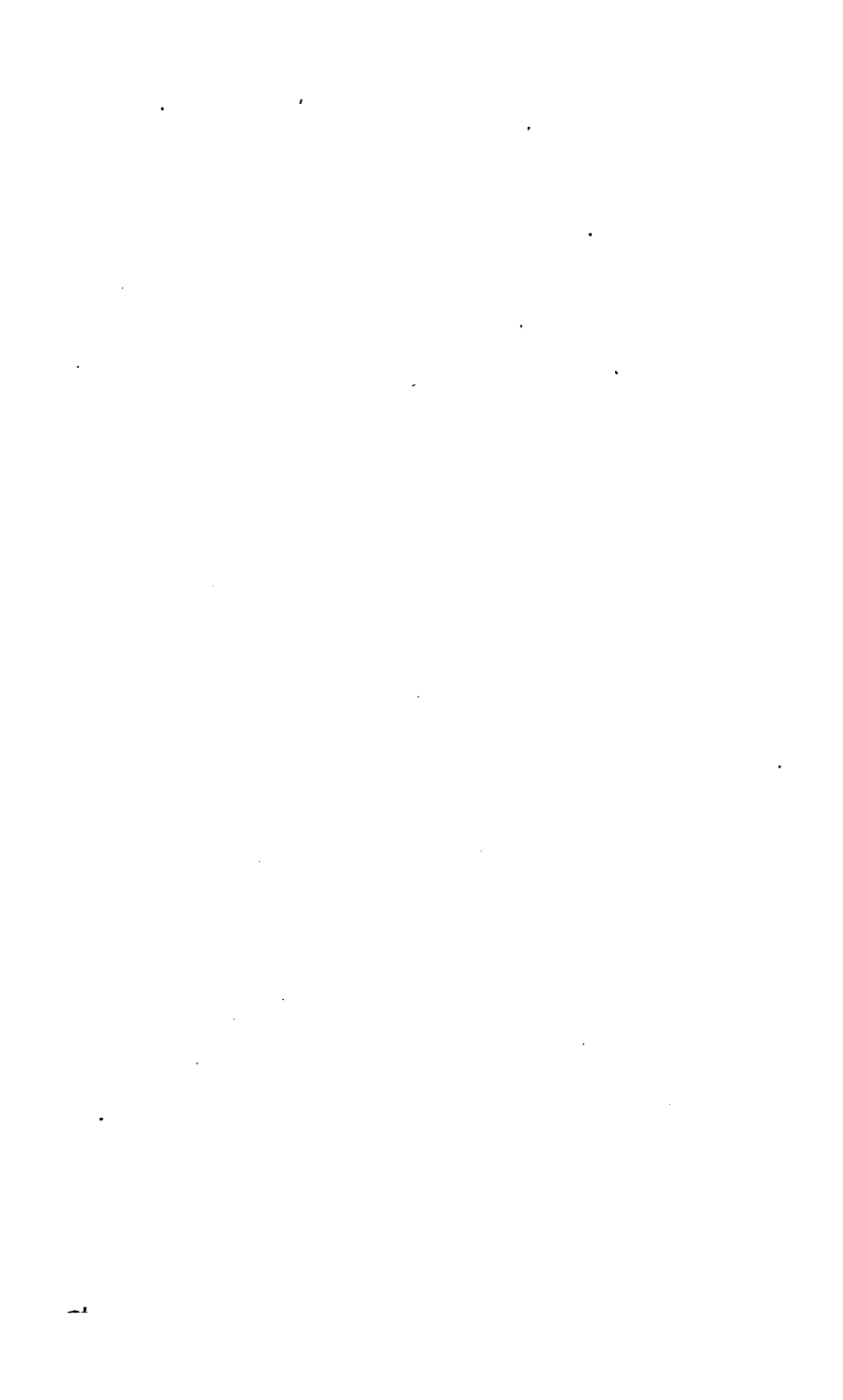
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CHARACTERS AND INCIDENTS

OF

VILLAGE LIFE,

MOSTLY FOUNDED ON FACT ;

INTENDED FOR

THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL INSTRUCTION
OF THE POOR.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE UTILITY,

AS PRACTICALLY EXEMPLIFIED,

OF

SMALL CLUBS IN COUNTRY PARISHES.

BY MRS. BOWLES,

OF WREMBILL RECTORY.

The short and simple annals of the poor.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR C. J. G. AND F. RIVINGTON,

62. ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD,

AND 11. WATERLOO PLACE, TALL MALL.

1831.

31.

27.



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AND 3. WATERLOO PLACE, Pall Mall.

1831.

27.



LONDON :
Printed by A. & R. Spottiswoode,
New-Street-Square.

TO

THE MARCHIONESS OF LANSDOWNE.

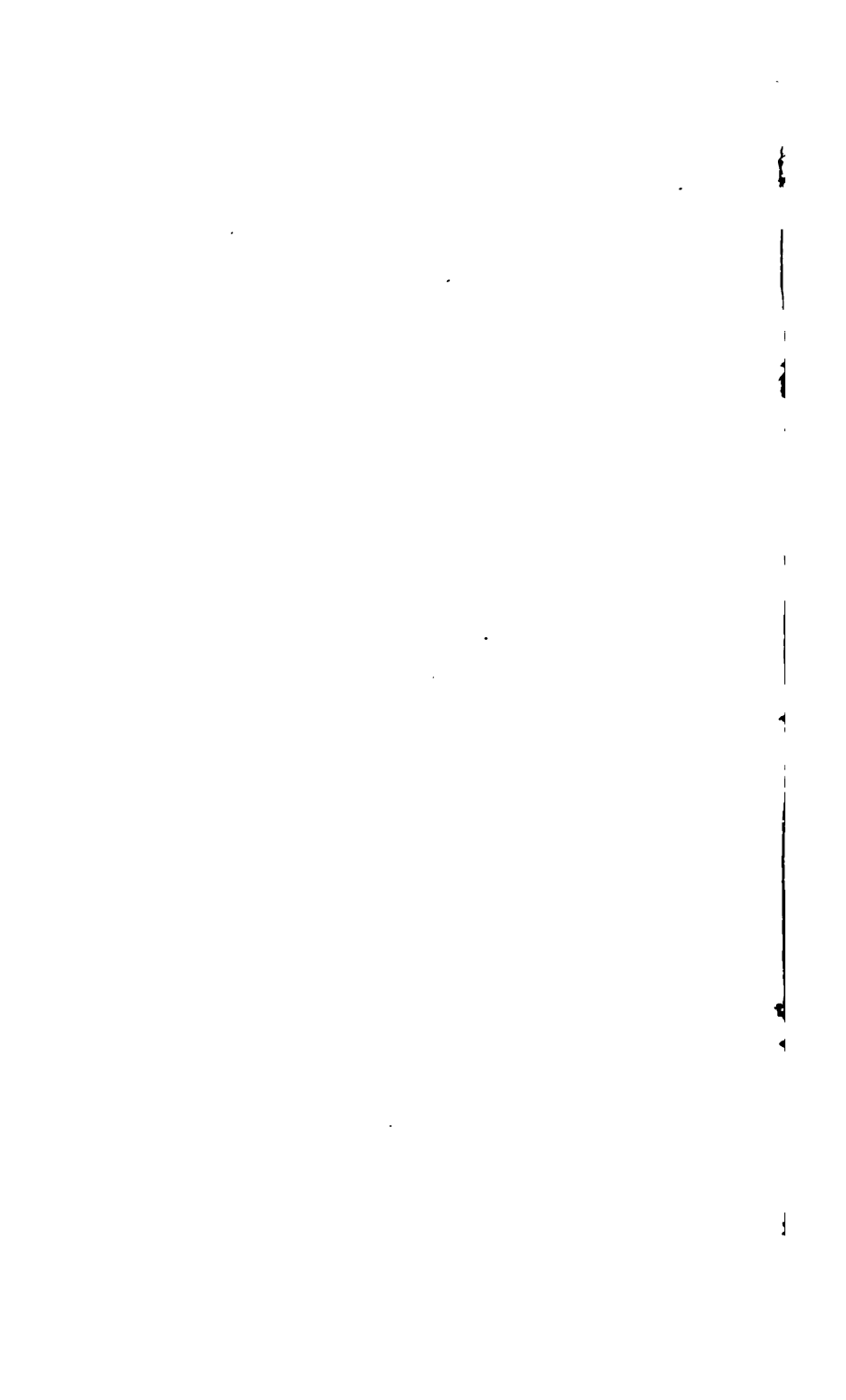
WHEN the following trifles were written, many years ago, and printed singly, Your Ladyship expressed your approbation of them; and now, having been persuaded to collect them together, and add some new matter, I know no one to whom with so much propriety I could dedicate this unpretending little book as to her who takes so active an interest in the concerns of humble life, and by whose benevolence so many of the young in this neighbourhood are instructed and clothed, and the old and poor visited and relieved. That you may long live to dispense joy and gladness to all around you, is the earnest wish of

Your Ladyship's

Obliged and faithful friend,

MAGDALENE BOWLES.

BREMILL,
3d May, 1831.

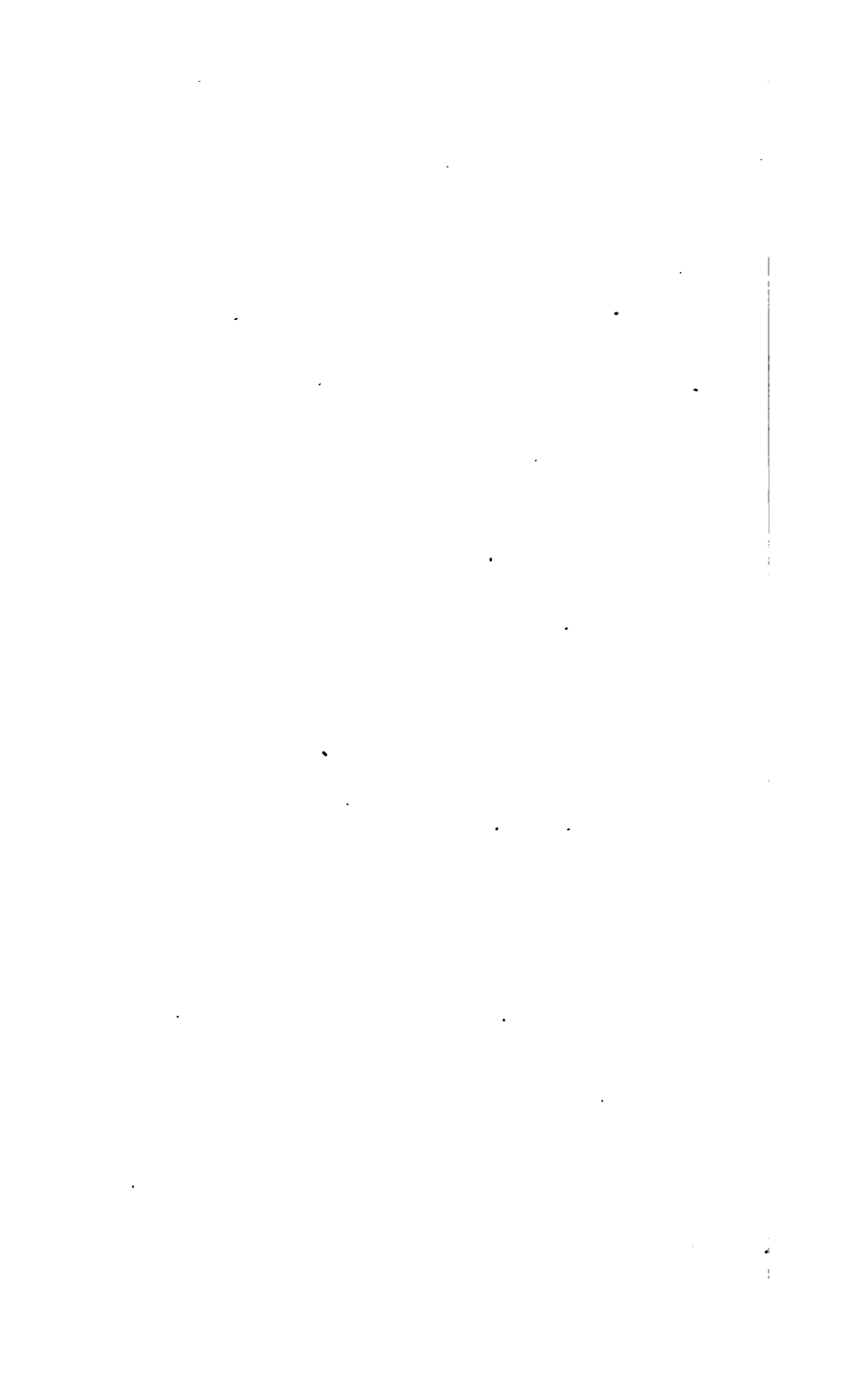


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PREFACE.

THE following little stories are mostly founded on real incidents which occurred in the parish where the Writer resides, and were printed many years ago, singly. Numerous applications having been made for them, they are now collected, with some additions, in one small Volume. Their object has been, not merely to counteract, in an age of louder obloquy, the effects of certain Village Dialogues, written, as it should seem, to throw an odium on the Parochial Clergy, but to show, by familiar examples, the miseries of infidelity and vice among the poor, on one side, and the unchristian, undisguised, Antinomian fanaticism, on the other.



LUCY SMITH;
OR,
THE YOUNG MAID
AND
HER MOTHER'S BIBLE.

To record the passing events that occur in humble life, is not, I trust, without utility, particularly in these times, when books and tracts of a dangerous tendency are circulated with a perseverance almost incredible, among the labouring poor. The sad effects which the distempered views of religion had upon the mind of a young and artless girl, it will be my business to record in the following pages.

Lucy Smith was the only daughter of respectable parents, whose little all consisted in a neat cottage, surrounded by a few acres of land, which, after some years of indefatigable industry, they were enabled to call their own. The house was pleasantly situated on an eminence, sheltered from the north wind by a screen of aged trees, whilst a sloping little garden to the south showed the extreme neatness of the possessors. Here were to be seen the first early spring flowers in the village; and, as summer advanced, the crocus and the pale primrose were succeeded by the honeysuckle, the pink in many of its varieties, the rose, and various other flowers, which perfumed the air with their fragrance, and rendered the appearance of the cottage, which opened into the garden, so neat,

and even interesting, that it often attracted the admiration of the passing traveller. The inside of the house wore the same air of neatness in all its parts. The shining pewter was ranged with great exactness upon the kitchen shelves; and upon the white walls of the small parlour hung the school works of Lucy: the sampler, in diversified colours, and, next to that, the mightier performance of the map of England, all traced out with the needle and diligent hand of the youthful artist. A few rude imitations of the flowers that were so frequently before her eyes, were to be seen over the mantle-piece; and these a fond and proud mother carefully preserved in a frame.

In happiness and peace glided away many years of the life of this respected pair: the first dawn of morning found them at their different avocations; whilst Lucy assisted her mother in the dairy, and when the necessary toils of the day were done, she regularly seated herself at a little oak table, and read a portion of Scripture to her parents, before they slept. The farmer and his wife had been religiously brought up, in the good old Church of England principles: they frequently heard with pain the Church and the Church minister railed at; but it had no effect in alienating them from their duty; they read their Bible with instruction and consolation, and derived from it that peace which the world cannot give. Some parts, indeed, they found difficult to understand; but these parts were often explained to them by their minister, a pious and learned man, who resided constantly in his parish; and every thing relating to their conduct in this life was so plainly laid down by our blessed Saviour himself, that they felt, if they endeavoured, with deep humility, to follow, praying for the blessings of grace, the great example he had set before them, they could not be in the wrong path.

Under the guidance of such worthy people, we cannot wonder that Lucy grew up religious, kind-hearted, and affectionate in the highest degree to her

parents; for, though an only child, she had never been falsely indulged, nor had the natural sweetness of her disposition been destroyed, by giving way to all the little humours and caprices attendant upon childhood. Her parents loved her with unfeigned affection, and that affection taught them to be anxious to correct her, whenever they saw occasion.

Lucy had now attained her eighteenth year; she was tall and of a prepossessing appearance; her countenance was animated with the glow of health, and her eyes beamed with cheerfulness. The cultivation of flowers was one of her favourite amusements; it was her hand that planted them in the little nice borders that surrounded the garden, which it was Lucy's pride to keep so neat, that a weed could not be discovered. Her next delight was to pluck the first rose of summer, and, with the aid of flowers less rare, to form a nosegay for her parents, to wear to church.

Poor Lucy! how soon did all these artless pleasures fade away, and thy young mind become the prey of many sorrows! The first interruption to Lucy's happiness was the declining state of her mother's health: her complaint, which was dropsical, was long and lingering. Lucy watched over her beloved parent with the greatest attention and tenderness; sometimes buoyed up with the hope that the medicines administered to her mother would restore her, at other times she sunk into a state of deep dejection at the rapid increase of her complaint; but these feelings were always carefully concealed from her mother, though it required an effort of the strongest kind to suppress her sobs and tears, when she looked upon the pale and emaciated countenance before her. The father's avocations kept him most of the day from home; but he never entered the sick chamber, upon his return, without seeing Lucy actively employed in attending upon her mother, and,

with the greatest patience and tenderness, anticipating every want.

Surely there can be no sight more interesting and acceptable to the Supreme Being, than that of an affectionate child hovering over the sick bed of a feeble parent, fulfilling all those tender duties, and paying back those anxious cares and attentions which she has received in her childhood.

All the solicitude and watchings of Lucy, by the bedside of her mother, could not avail. God has said, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou must return." One evening, as Lucy and her father were watching the short and heaving breath of the departing sufferer, she made a sign for her daughter to bring her the Bible, which lay in the chair beside her, and clasping it with her feeble hands, she kissed it, and gave it to her weeping child. Her lips moved as if in prayer. The father and daughter knelt down by the bed: life was fast receding; she made an effort to raise herself; it was the last struggle of expiring nature; she sunk upon the bosom of her husband, and ceased to breathe.

Lucy still held in her hand the precious gift of her mother. "I will never part with it," said she, kissing with fervour the holy book, and weeping violently as she continued to gaze upon the inanimate form before her. Her attention, after a time, was turned towards her father. He still knelt beside the bed of death: Lucy approached him, and they mingled their tears in silence: the entreaties of his daughter at last prevailed upon him to leave the room.

In a few days all the melancholy preparations for the funeral were completed. Poor Lucy had a mournful pleasure in decking the corpse of her mother with a few flowers of spring: she wept bitterly as she walked round the little garden to select those particular ones she remembered her mother, when living, was so fond of. Alas! what melancholy association of ideas did the flowers she held in her hand now

convey ! Her parent no longer lived to admire their beauty and sweetness ; they were destined to be the last tribute of affectionate regard she should ever be able to pay ; and, whilst placing them round the pallid form of her mother, her tears fell fast, and with difficulty did she finish her mournful employment.

The friends of the deceased came to look their last farewell : they admired the placid countenance of the corpse ; it denoted, they said, without a doubt, that she was now happy ; and they tried to comfort the weeping husband and daughter with this assurance.

By the young and ardent, who have hitherto viewed life only in its most attractive form, who have had no affliction, but are blessed with health and spirits, while hope gilds all their prospects, the first stroke of sorrow is felt with peculiar bitterness. It seemed to Lucy, as she hung over the corpse of her mother, that, when this beloved object was consigned to the earth, she should never again know happiness : she shrunk from consolation, and could not believe that time would reconcile her to the loss ; her streaming eyes were lifted to heaven, and her fervent wish and prayer was, that she and her father might soon be admitted into those regions of bliss, where she should again meet that parent whose loss she now so bitterly deplored. These are the natural feelings of youth new to affliction ; time, however, *did* imperceptibly shed its healing balm over the mind of Lucy : she had many occupations to prevent her thoughts dwelling continually upon her loss ; she managed her father's house, and, though she had a servant to assist her, she did not allow herself to be a moment idle. The cottage of the farmer stood at some distance from any other house ; their nearest neighbours lived about a quarter of a mile from them ; the family consisted of three persons, a father and two daughters, one of them about the age of Lucy, the other some years older : they were kind and neighbourly at the time

Lucy lost her mother; and this kindness imperceptibly led her to think favourably of them, and feel grateful for the little attentions they paid her. It is true, she remembered her mother always objected to her making them her intimate associates, as they were often heard to laugh at and turn into ridicule their neighbours, for taking the trouble of going two miles to church, which they called a heap of stones. The farmer did not think about these matters so seriously as his wife had done. Lucy was so kind and affectionate to him, that he felt glad that she should sometimes have a little recreation; and therefore he rather encouraged the intimacy which was taking place between his daughter and the young woman. Lucy was naturally, from the afflictive event that had taken place in her family, more than usually alive to attention and kindness, and she said to herself, Surely, if my poor mother had known them better, she would not have forbidden my being often with these people. — One Sunday, after she had attended church with her father, and had just finished reading to him a part of the Bible, which the clergyman, in his sermon of the day, had pointed out to their particular attention, her two female friends entered, and persuaded Lucy, as the afternoon was fine, to take a walk with them. After sauntering about for some time, they came in sight of the meeting. This was a professed Anti-nomian meeting. "Come," said her eldest companion; "come, service is just going to begin, it will not be over before it is dark, but we will see you safe home." Lucy hesitated — she remembered her mother's injunctions never to leave her church; curiosity, however, and the urgent entreaties of her friends, (most unhappily for her,) overcame her scruples. This visit to the meeting naturally led to an acquaintance with a minister, whom she frequently met at the house of her new associates. Religion was always the topic of conversation; and he soon convinced this poor timid girl that she had no chance of salvation

if she still persisted in going to church, and hearing formal prayers, and more particularly the Lord's Prayer. Lucy started at this assertion: "How can that be wrong," said she, "which our Saviour himself taught his disciples to use?" — "It is, however, wrong," said the preacher; "and therefore *we* never suffer it to be read in our chapel."

Lucy returned home disheartened and dispirited. When her father returned in the evening, seated himself in his bee-hive chair, and called upon his daughter, as usual, to read the Psalms and Lessons of the day, her mind was so distracted by the bewildering arguments of the man whom she had just left, that she did not attend to her father's request, but kept turning over the leaves of the Bible, apparently quite lost in thought. "What is the matter, my child?" said the farmer. Lucy was roused from her train of thinking by this question; and, hastily finding out the Lessons, read them to her father, who thought no more of her disturbed and altered manner.

When Sunday came, Lucy made some trifling excuse for not attending her father to church; and, as soon as he was gone, she sat down to read the various tracts that, from time to time, had been given her by her indefatigable friends. She still kept her sentiments carefully concealed from her father; but the change that took place in Lucy was soon visible: the house, which used to be a pattern of neatness, was now quite neglected; the dairy was entirely left to the management of the servant, who wasted and spoiled much of its produce; the little garden, also, which had hitherto been so much her pride and delight, was no longer the admiration of the passing traveller; weeds ran in profusion over it, and choked the few scattered flowers that remained. Lucy sat all day long poring over the books that had been put into her hands; and their tendency to excite fanatical feelings, rather than plain unaffected scriptural piety,

was soon too apparent in the conduct of this poor deluded girl. The farmer at first remonstrated in gentle terms with his daughter for her astonishing and total neglect of all household duties; but when at last he discovered the cause, he bitterly lamented his own weakness, in having allowed of any intimacy with the chapel people: he insisted, in a loud and angry tone, that she should give up all further communication with this canting tribe, as he called them. Lucy wept, but continued firm in her resolution not to forsake her zealous friends; nor could any entreaty or threat of her father persuade her to enter the church, where she would probably, at this distracting moment, have received peace and consolation in hearing the very text that bewildered her, expounded in a clear manner.

When all that had passed at the cottage was related by Lucy to her spiritual guide, he rejoiced greatly, and bid her not desist, for the persecution she suffered was for *righteousness' sake*. Poor girl! no semblance of rejoicing could be traced upon her countenance: her mind was disturbed — her peace broken; her father, who used to regard her with the tenderest affection, was now so angry with her for her obstinate adherence to the *new light*, that he scarcely ever spoke to her but in terms of bitterness and reproach. She often, as she laid her head on her pillow at night, contrasted her former happy life with that which she now led. To have opposed the wishes of a kind parent she would then have thought impossible; *now* she was *enlightened*, it was told that *religion required her to do so*: all the tender affections were to be blunted, and the God of mercy and kindness, according to the creed she had now learnt, must be considered as a stern and arbitrary judge, whom she was to worship in trembling and fear.

One evening, as she was returning from the meeting, she was overtaken by the man who had been so persevering in his endeavours to *convert* her, as he called

it. Having spoken in high commendation of the firmness of her conduct, he told her, he must now call upon her, with the rest of his flock, to contribute to his necessities, which at present were very urgent. Lucy gave him the contents of her purse, which amounted to only a few shillings. From time to time he continued to solicit her for money: Lucy was much perplexed by his frequent demands; all her little store was soon exhausted, and at last she was obliged to confess she had no more to give. But this indefatigable person was not to be so easily repelled; he had drawn from the poor unguarded girl, that her father had a hoard of guineas by him: this was a prize not to be lost; he persuaded her that there could be no harm in appropriating a small part of this sum to his use: he spoke of the obligations she lay under to him — he had snatched her from the path of destruction, and how could money be better employed than in paying him for such heavenly instruction as he continued, and would always continue, to give her? Lucy was startled at the proposal: to take money secretly from her father, must be a wrong act; for, were we not told in Scripture, that we should not “do evil that good may abound?” Her religious guide, however, soon silenced all these objections, by a number of specious and bewildering arguments, and at last wrung from her a reluctant consent, that she would endeavour to procure for him some part of the hoard.

Days and weeks passed on without her putting her promise in execution. She had often walked into her father's room when she knew he was absent in the fields; but the sight of the box that contained the money threw her into a fit of trembling, and the innate principle of right was still so strong, that she could not bring herself to act in opposition to it: at last, wearied out by the remonstrances, threats, and denunciations of the preacher, she determined, at all events, to take a few guineas from the box; that sum,

perhaps, might never be missed, and the use of it would be of the greatest service and importance to her friend. With these specious reasonings fully impressed upon her mind, she took the opportunity, one night, of her father's sleeping from home, to effect her purpose.

It had been a gloomy, sunless day, and, as the evening closed in, heavy storms of rain fell, accompanied by gusts of wind which shook the cottage casements. Lucy trembled violently as she listened to the hollow sound of the storm, and the candle she held in her hand was often nearly extinguished by the wind. Her heart beat as she approached the box, the key of which she had taken from a drawer where it was always kept. A number of papers and old books lay at the top of the box, and completely concealed the treasure beneath. Lucy removed all these, whilst the wind whistled round her, and often, by its sudden gusts, made her for a moment or two relinquish her search. At last the canvass bag was discovered, tied up with great care: it was heavy, but Lucy did not stop to count its contents; she hastily took out four guineas, and then, replacing the bag, covered the box over as before with the papers and books. Poor Lucy could with difficulty control the agitation of her mind. She sat down to read, but her attention was distracted, and she was startled every moment by the storm that beat against the windows. This made her get up, to put by her tracts, when her eye glanced upon the Bible, the dying gift of her mother. Since she had been converted she had seldom looked into it, and it remained unmolested upon the top shelf of the cupboard. She had possessed herself of one called the *Self-interpreting Bible*, officiously provided for her by her spiritual guide. The sudden sight of her mother's holy present at such a moment as this had a strong effect upon Lucy's mind: every thing connected with this precious gift rushed upon her imagination; she wept with bitter-

ness, and remorse and agony took full possession of her mind. She retired to bed, but her rest was disturbed and broken; in her dreams her mother appeared before her dressed in her graveclothes, pointing reproachfully at the box whence she had taken the treasure, and then seemed in the act of advancing, with menacing looks, towards the bed. The loud shrieks of Lucy dispelled the dream, but left the poor sufferer exhausted, and almost petrified with fear. She slept no more, but rose with the morning dawn, almost determined to return the money. However, this good resolution was not carried into effect: the preacher, who knew of her father's absence, and Lucy's intention of taking that opportunity of getting the money, was early at the farm to secure the treasure, and of course would not listen to the pathetic reasonings of Lucy, and the strong wish she expressed to replace the money in her father's box. He then departed, not a little pleased at the success of his visit.

The farmer returned to dinner; and for some days did not discover his loss. However, having occasion to examine his box, he found the papers and books not placed, he was sure, in the manner he had left them. He knew the exact sum of money he had in the bag, and, upon counting it over soon discovered the deficiency. Who can have done this act? thought the astonished father. His daughter's estranged conduct, her distress and agitation when he returned home, all now rushed upon his mind, and he felt a horrible conviction that she was the culprit. The poor farmer was much agitated at the thought, and sat for some time ruminating upon the affair: at last he determined to accuse Lucy at *once* of the theft; and, seeing her in the garden, he called her to him up stairs, and said, in a sorrowful tone of voice, "Girl, girl, what wicked wretch could have tempted you to rob your poor old father?" At these dreadful words, overcome with shame,

with horror, and remorse, poor Lucy fell senseless at his feet. The farmer was greatly alarmed and shocked at the situation of his daughter : she at last revived, and, with pale and quivering lips, made a full confession of her guilt. He heard her without interruption : all his angry feelings were directed against the man who, under the mask of religion, had tempted her to do this evil ; and, snatching up his hat, hastily sallied out in quest of him. His steps were directed to his neighbour's house, whom he found at home with his daughters. He related all that had occurred at the cottage, in words scarcely articulate, from the agitation of his mind. He reproached them all bitterly for the part they had acted : " But for you," said he, " Lucy would have been the same good and affectionate child she was at her mother's death. What do these new lights that you talk about do, but turn all sober and religious principles upside down ? My poor girl has gone sorrowing on ever since the time that she forsook the place of worship into whose communion she had been baptized. We Church-people meddle with no man's religion ; and why cannot you keep your doctrines to yourselves, and not run about disturbing the peace and comfort of families ? As to your preacher, I am determined to hunt him out and expose his conduct ; and that was the cause of my coming to your house, where I thought I should find him." — " Why, neighbour, all this heat and anger at us ?" said the man, addressing the farmer ; " we have not got your money ; and as to our preacher, he only meant, I dare say, to borrow it of your daughter, and will, no doubt, bring it back again. It was the Lord's will that she should be converted from the evil of her way : poor lost sinner as she was, she heard nothing but heathen morality at church ; and when our preacher took her in hand, she did not know any thing that she ought to know about *faith*. Who could be more *thoroughly convinced* than the man that was hanged the other day, or more full of heavenly hope ?

Nay, he even, I am told, wrote a letter, the night before he was executed, to the mother of the wife he had murdered, to say he had no doubt at all of meeting her daughter in a better world!" — "Strange doctrine this, neighbour!" said the farmer, shrugging up his shoulders; "if works are of no consideration in the eye of God, why do all the Apostles enforce them so strongly? St. Paul saith, 'Faith, hope, and charity, but the greatest of these is charity;' and St. Peter, 'Add to your faith virtue.' And is it not said that the prayers and alms of Cornelius are come up as a memorial before God? Our minister always tells us that good works must accompany faith, and he sets an example of this doctrine in his own conduct. It is no wonder that crimes of every sort increase daily, when murderers, without any repentance, or any sorrow for their past lives, go triumphantly to the gallows, and there declare their presumptuous belief of being certain of salvation, whilst others, who 'love mercy and walk humbly with their God,' never forgetting to pray for his grace (which my poor Lucy did, till she was led away from the church), are told that all this availeth nothing against God's eternal decrees!"

Upon the farmer's return home, he found poor Lucy sitting in the place he had left her. She no longer wept, but had a fixed and melancholy look. Her father spoke to her in a kind tone of voice, and assured her he did not blame her half so much as the man who, under the mask of sanctity, had tempted her to act in this manner. He bid her take heart, and listen no more to any perversion of God's plain words, and all would do well again. Lucy sighed deeply, looked at her father, but did not speak. In a few days she betrayed evident signs of derangement; her quick and hurried step—the starting eye—her incoherent questions and wild answers—too fatally announced that the most dreadful and awful malady to which human nature is subject had befallen her. What words can

paint the distress of her aged parent when he heard his poor suffering child, in wild and disordered terms, speak of her lost condition, and wring her hands in agony at the frenzied idea, that she was for ever shut out from the throne of mercy! Medical advice was of course called in; and, as the malady continued to increase, the father, at last, gave a reluctant consent that she should be removed into a place of security.

When the chaise arrived that was to take her away from the cottage, the state of her father's mind may be more easily imagined than described. He was now to part with his only daughter, who had been the solace and comfort of his age. Gentle, kind, affectionate, and happy, till fanatical people bewildered her understanding, and at last destroyed it, her death would have been a far less afflicting circumstance than seeing her in the state she now was. The resistance she made to the removal, her piercing shrieks, and looks of agony, were always strong in her father's memory.

Poor Lucy never recovered sufficiently to be restored to her home and friends. The last accounts I heard of her was from a female relation of hers, who had called at the place where she was confined, and was admitted to see her. She found her walking in the garden, apparently in earnest conversation all the time with people she had once known, and whom her disordered imagination fancied were now her companions. She stopped at seeing her relation — looked earnestly at her for some time, as if endeavouring to collect her scattered thoughts—and the next moment, forgetting she was present, continued her hurried walk and incoherent conversation with her fancied companions. One very affecting circumstance occurred during her visit to the poor maniac. As she was walking with her, they came in sight of some flowers. Poor Lucy stood still — she looked at her relation, and then at the flowers; and, as if a sudden thought at that moment crossed her imagination, hastily began to gather them; and then, forming them with great

quickness into small nosegays, "This," she said, putting them into her relation's hands, "you must give my father; and the other is for my mother's grave:" then, bursting into tears, she continued her walk in silence, and seemed to take no farther notice of any thing that was passing.

The farmer still lives: time, and, above all, religious feelings, derived from the instruction of the minister and the plain Bible, have taught him resignation to his hard lot.

The man who had been the cause of all this misery, by his indiscreet zeal and lax morality, became so unpopular with the respectable part of the community to which he belonged, that ever since the melancholy fate of poor Lucy was known, they refused attending the meeting where he preached, and he was obliged to leave the neighbourhood: before he set off, however, he wrote a letter to the farmer, vindicating every part of his conduct; and saying, he considered the money given him by Lucy as his *perfect right*, "for the labourer was worthy of his hire."

In the leading circumstances of the history of Lucy Smith, we see fully exemplified the sad effects of turning aside from plain scriptural doctrine, to listen to the wild dogmas of fanatics, who always interpret Scripture as it suits their system of thinking; and that want of charity, which they so loudly complain of not being shown them by members of the Established Church, forms too often a striking part in their own character; otherwise why all that bitterness against it, and that eager zeal to convince the ignorant and unwary, that no safety is within its pale, and by their bewildering and gloomy doctrines producing despair and madness?

I cannot conclude my remarks upon this subject better than in giving the words of an excellent man and learned divine; their beauty, truth, and simplicity must strike every reader: "I profess, that my mind can see nothing more plain, sedate, or dignified;

more beautiful in constitution, more venerable in external forms; more rational in doctrine, or more amiable in spirit, than the Church of England; nothing which (without claiming for her ideal infallibility or impossible perfection) appears to me to be so exactly adapted to promote the glory of God, by her 'reasonable worship,' or the virtue and happiness of mankind, by her practical and consolatory tenets. When, like the patriarch's dove, I venture out for a moment upon the rude ocean of conflicting religious opinions, by which she is surrounded; like her, I return with gladness to our ark, as the only spot of safety, peace, and rest. *Here* I find something intelligible, convincing, improving; something that satisfies my understanding, affects my heart, and *soothes* while 'it tries my reins,' 'searches my spirit,' and awes my soul."—Warner's Letter to the Bishop of Gloucester.

April 27th, 1818.

THE
OLD COTTAGER.

A TALE FROM REAL LIFE.

IN the most beautiful part of a romantic village, which has been admired by many a passing traveller, stood an old cottage, which seemed, like its possessors, hastening to decay. You entered by a wicket through a small garden, which, as it received a very little cultivation from its inhabitants, was merely a receptacle for the dirt, broken pans, or any other rubbish from the cottage. Within, all was wretchedness; and had it not been for the light that was admitted by the door, you would have been almost in darkness. A window no doubt there was; but it was broken in several places, and the shattered panes were supplied by old rags, which excluded, with the air, the light also.

The inhabitants of this miserable abode consisted of a man and his wife. They had two daughters; but they were grown up, and had left their desolate home. Nothing could exhibit in a stronger light the effects of the want of religious instruction, than the character the old man displayed. On Sunday, indeed, he heard the bells, and saw many a clean and happy cottager passing on with cheerful looks to the village church; but he never joined the group, though he generally sat at his door with a lowering countenance and dark matted locks, whilst his whole appearance was rendered disgusting from want of cleanliness.

When he was young there were no Sunday Schools established for the instruction of the labouring poor; and though his parents took care that he should be taught to read, and seemed pleased with the progress he made in his learning, this instruction was not followed up by setting him a good example, and making him constantly attend with them the service of the church. They seldom went themselves; and the Sabbath generally was spent by their boy, in running about the fields, with two or three vicious companions, busied in any mischievous idleness that presented itself. Sometimes his mother would chide him, and his father shake his stick with a threatening look; but this was generally all the reproof he received, and of course every evil habit was strengthened. When he became a man, he followed the trade of a woolsorter. It is true, he worked with industry; but not from a wish to make himself respectable and independent, for his earnings were almost all spent at the alehouse, and he was constantly remarked for being dressed in the most mean and slovenly manner, and for the contempt he seemed to have for all orderly society.

One would suppose it almost impossible that a character of this description should find any creditable woman to marry him; but happening to go into a distant county, he there met with a young girl, of respectable connections, who was deaf to the intreaties of her friends, and united her fate to his, and soon after their marriage followed him to his native village. It could not be expected that, with his habits of riot and disorder, he should make a good husband; and the poor young woman quickly found that she had exchanged a comfortable and respectable home for a miserable cottage, a drunken husband, and poverty of the most abject sort. She soon had two little helpless children to share her wants; and as she pressed them to her bosom she would often weep to think how different her fate might have been, had she listened to the tender and excellent counsel of her

parents, who repeatedly told her, that a husband with such habits must bring her and a helpless family to poverty and misery. Too soon, alas ! was this warning verified, and self-accusation sharpened all her pangs. Her father and mother were many miles distant from her. She heard and saw nothing of them ; and shame kept her from writing, and acknowledging the misery they had foreseen, which had now, indeed, befallen her in its fullest extent.

Years passed away, still poverty and wretchedness were the inhabitants of the cottage ; ill-health was now added to the poor woman's other misfortunes, and made her feel more bitterly her unfortunate lot. The unhappy pair, though living under the same roof, hardly ever spoke to each other, without contemptuous taunts on one side, and bitter reproaches on the other. He allowed his wife hardly any thing to support her ; and she often wanted bread, while he was spending his earnings in sottish indolence at the alehouse. The poor woman at length, rendered callous by such repeated hard usage, quite estranged herself from him. Necessity, indeed, obliged her to live under the same roof ; but they had different beds, and ate their solitary crusts apart from each other. She was now become old and feeble ; grown almost double with the weight of sorrow and sickness. He, also, was descended into the vale of years. Had he been provident, he might have been living in comfort, reaping the fruits of his youthful industry ; but now his chief dependence for support was upon the casual relief of the parish. Still he remained hardened in sin, and thought nothing of a world to come. At last he was roused to a deep sense of his errors, by an awful event that took place in his cottage. His wife had been long in an infirm state of health, and one of her daughters had for some time been living with her mother ; but as she was obliged to earn her subsistence by working in the fields, she was not always at hand to assist her feeble parent, in fetching water from

the neighbouring brook, which ran at no great distance from the cottage. One evening the poor old woman felt herself giddy and unwell; but this did not deter her from tottering out to fill her pitcher. She succeeded in getting some water from the running stream, and had just strength to reach home, and place her jug upon the table, when she uttered a piercing cry, and fell! Her daughter at that instant entered the house, and rushed towards her dying parent to raise her in her arms. She spake not, she moved not; but after the lapse of a few moments, gave a convulsive sigh, and ceased to breathe!

It was a dark autumnal evening, the wind murmured with a hollow blast through this dismal abode of poverty and death; and the fast-falling leaves, which were blown with a melancholy rustling sound towards the cottage, seemed a fit emblem of the decay and misery within. The corpse lay extended upon a mattress of straw, the daughter stood in speechless agony by the side, and two or three of the neighbours were also gathered round the bed of death. At this moment, unconscious of what had happened, the old cottager entered; he saw his weeping daughter, and hurried towards her; but how great was his agony and despair in hearing her exclaim, *O my dear mother, she is dead!* The cottage was almost in darkness, so that he could only indistinctly see the corpse, as it lay extended on its miserable bed; but this very indistinctness added peculiar horror to the scene. All his unkindness rushed upon his memory: he could not weep, he could not speak; his eyes were fixed with a vacant stare upon the corpse, which, as the women hurried round the bed with a light, soon became perfectly visible to his view; he turned away in anguish indescribable; rushed up stairs, and threw himself upon his flock bed: tears then came to his relief, and they fell in large drops down his aged cheeks. At last nature, wearied by such a conflict, hushed his cares to sleep; but this repose did not continue long

tranquil. The awful event of the day gave rise to the most distressing dreams, from which he would start with terror, and for a moment lose the recollection of the past, from the confusion the visions of the night had left upon his mind; but when he was quite awake, the whole truth of his afflicting loss rushed with ten-fold horror upon his memory. He could sleep no more; but striking a light, crept from his unquiet bed, and with trembling steps proceeded to look once more upon the corpse. An awful silence, unbroken by any sound but the midnight wind, reigned around. He trembled excessively, and doubted whether he should have courage to gaze upon those features, which only a few hours before had been animated with the spark of life; that spark, indeed, had been long faint and lingering, but he never thought of the possibility of its being so suddenly extinguished. He was soon by the bed of death; and placing the candle in a little low chair, at last he took courage to raise his eyes, and they rested upon the inanimate form before him. What would the miserable old man have given at this moment to have felt his "conscience void of offence" towards God, and towards man. He groaned aloud; and kneeling down by the side of the corpse, for the first time almost in his life prayed fervently to God to forgive him all his past offences. He felt deeply at this awful moment how dreadful his conduct had been: a life of more than sixty years had been spent, without one action on which he could look back with a calm conscience. He had early despised the first and great duties of life; he had been a most unkind husband, a negligent father, and had lived without God in the world. He looked again and again at the inanimate form before him, and touched her hand and forehead; but shrunk with terror from the icy feel of death. At this affecting moment the thoughts of another world rushed most forcibly upon his mind, and seemed to him, as if the Being, whose eyes are over all, had heard his groans and fervent prayers, and shed

a balm upon his wounded mind. He rose from his knees more composed and comforted. His neighbours saw, with surprise, the excessive grief of the old cottager ; for they had expected, from his general conduct towards his wife, that her death would be regarded as a matter of indifference by him. She was soon consigned to her earthly bed, followed by her weeping and repentant husband. He entered the church for the first time, upon this awful occasion, for many years. The solemn and beautiful Service for the Dead struck deep upon his heart, and when the grassy sod shut out from his streaming eyes the last mortal remains of her, whom he had so deeply injured, he bent his head upon her grave, and resolved from that moment to dedicate the remainder of his life to a sincere and deep repentance.

In a few weeks the change in the old man's conduct was visible. The return of the Sabbath was no longer beheld by him with indifference. He hastened at the sound of the village bells to climb the steep ascent that led to the church, and entered the house of God, divested of all worldly thoughts. His aged eyes were fixed upon the Minister, and he joined with the greatest fervour in the prayers of the church ; and when the Pastor spoke in his sermon of the unbounded goodness of God, that mercy was his great attribute, and that he desired "not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live," the poor old man, with uplifted eyes to Heaven, felt comforted by these consoling promises ; and it was impossible to see him leave the church, bending upon his staff, with contrition and meekness painted upon his countenance, without adoring that Power, which stretches forth its hand to save and to guide repentant sinners. The Pastor of the village, who resided constantly upon his living, and was frequent in his calls upon his poor parishioners, relieving some, and comforting others, observed with peculiar delight the great change that had taken place in the

conduct of the old man. He often visited him in his lowly abode ; strengthened his hopes by pointing out to him those passages in the Bible, which spoke of the mercies and kindness of God, who had given his only Son to die for our sins, and to open the gates of mercy for repentant sinners.

The old cottager soon found what comfort the study of the Holy Scriptures afforded him. It had quieted his restless and selfish spirit, and made him meek and lowly of heart. The awful event that had so suddenly awakened him to a sense of his lost condition was continually present to his mind ; and when he looked back upon the number of years he had spent in so unprofitable a manner, he shuddered at the thoughts of having so long been upon the very brink of a precipice, and from which he was almost miraculously withdrawn. He read over and over again the eleventh chapter of St. Matthew ; the three concluding verses were imprinted upon his mind, and he found how true those beautiful sentiments of our Saviour are, when he says, "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." The old man found the advantage of having been taught to read in his youth, though he felt bitterly how little he had profited by this advantage ; and he had less excuse, for he lived in a village where the religious instruction of the poor is particularly attended to. However, there is every reason to suppose he would have gone on to the end of his days, without the thought of the future, had not death, in its most awful form, shown him how vain and transitory are all things here below. Sometimes the aged penitent would sit at his cottage door, watching the last rays of the departing sun ; his mind would be lifted up above the transitory scenes of earth ; he thought of her whose mortal remains lay in a cold and narrow bed,

but whose spirit he trusted was now above, and permitted to witness his sincere repentance; and that he, in God's good time, should be a sharer of her felicity. With these thoughts and prayers the day generally began and ended.

One evening, when the Clergyman was returning from visiting one of his flock, he called in upon the old man, and found him weeping bitterly; upon enquiring the cause, he was told that the parish officers had given him notice to quit his cottage. He had lived in this old ruined place upwards of forty years; and so strong is local attachment in the human heart, that though the aged man was told he should be put in a much more comfortable habitation in the same village, yet the parting from the cottage seemed to him like the parting from an old friend, with whom we had passed our life, and from whom we were suddenly to be severed for ever. The daughter was also looking very mournfully; but seeing her father so afflicted, had not disclosed to him the cause of her sorrow. Following the Clergyman a few steps from the door, she told him the parish officers talked of separating her from her aged parent. The Pastor bid her be comforted, and said he would make some arrangements that would prevent this distressing event taking place. Upon enquiry he found that the old ruined cottage, when repaired, was adapted for a large family; and that a comfortable abode was to be allotted to the aged man in its room. At the entreaty of the Minister the separation from the daughter was given up, and he went himself to the cottage to announce the arrangement. In the mean time the poor girl had informed her father of the threatened evil, which appeared so much greater a deprivation than the loss of his old house, that when he heard that, through the kind intercession of the Minister, his child was still to live with him, he cheerfully acceded to his departure, which took place on the following day. When he with slow and trembling steps turned

to close the wicket after him, and look upon the cottage which he had slept in for the last time, he could not refrain his tears; and continued, as he mounted the hill, to turn his head and gaze at his ancient abode, till a winding path, which led to his new habitation, shut it out from his view.

From the story of the old man we may draw many useful reflections. And first, let it be remembered that sobriety is one of the greatest preservatives from evil. When that barrier is removed, vices of many descriptions find an easy inroad to our hearts. By attentively examining the Scriptures, in many places in them we shall see what detestation the vice of drunkenness was held in. Solomon says in his Proverbs, that "the drunkard shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." And in Jeremiah we find that it is one of God's denunciations against a rebellious people. The old man, whose history I have related, dates most of his vices from this cause. It hardened his heart, and shut out all those tender feelings which connect man with his fellow creatures; it made him look with indifference upon the distresses of a feeble wife and helpless family; and in short, by gradual degrees, brought him to the very brink of destruction. Let the young learn from this story, that vice, with all its allurements, has not the power of conferring, even in its gratifications, the enjoyment which sobriety, prudence, and, above all, religious feelings give. Let those whom fast-stealing years remind that they are hastening to that period, so beautifully illustrated by Solomon in Ecclesiastes, "when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in their way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pit be broken at the fountain, or the wheel bro'

the cistern : then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." Learn from the example of the aged cottager the heartfelt blessing that repentance bestows. It can be seen in his humble and resigned looks; it can be seen in his respect to his superiors; in his constant attendance at church, and his devout conduct there; in his resignation and meekness under all the ills attendant upon poverty and old age. He will tell the enquiring stranger with truth and simplicity that he derived more inward satisfaction from the comforts afforded by a steady perseverance in the paths of virtue, than he ever found from any of the gratifications of sin. But let it be remembered what infinite sorrow and distress of mind the poor cottager would have been spared, had he, before the weight of years pressed upon him, and before the grave closed upon his wife, set about this work of repentance. And how many bitter pangs of conscience he would have escaped, had he "remembered his Creator in the days of his youth; while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

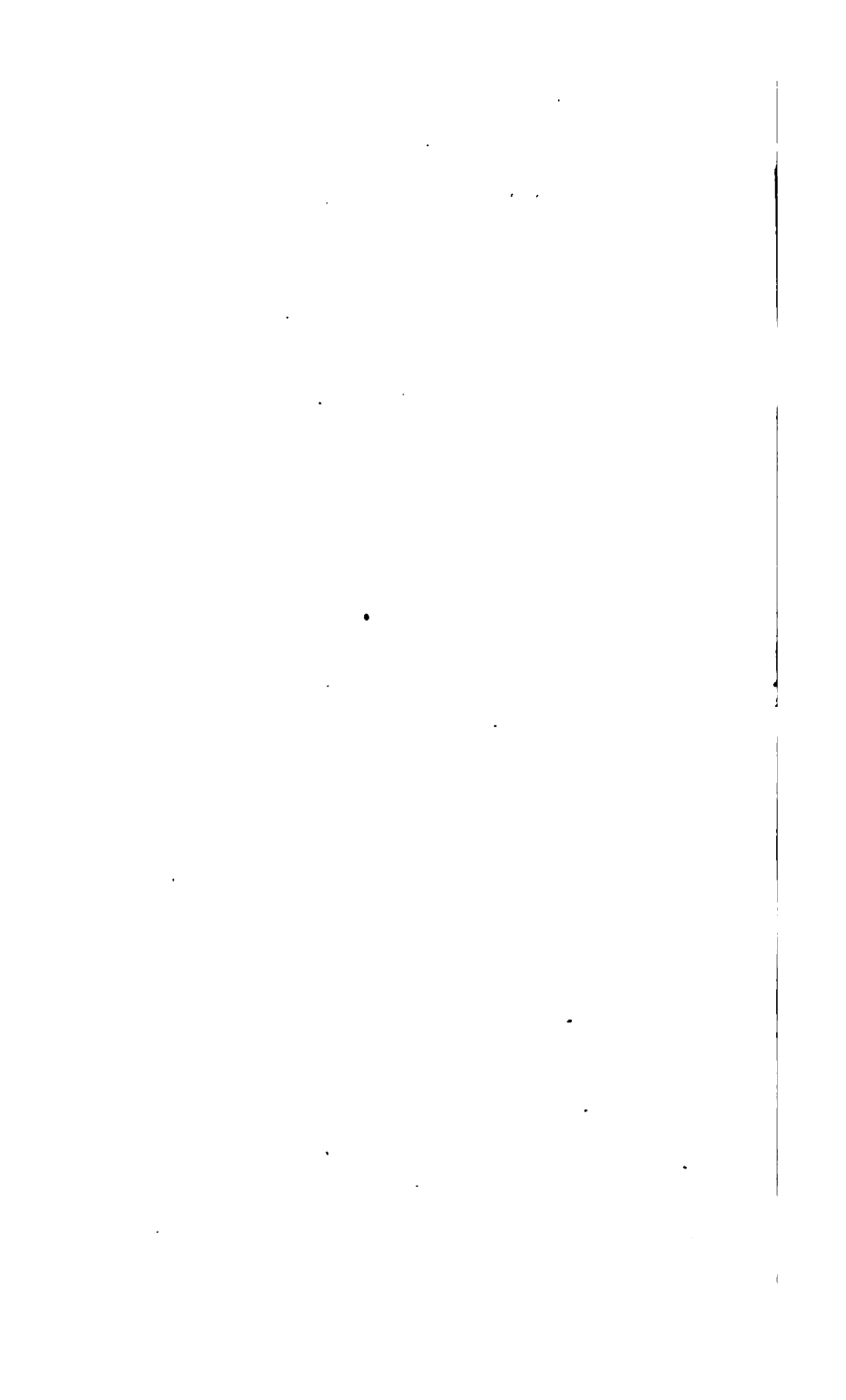
The following Epitaph was written by the Clergyman of the parish, where the Old Cottager resided, upon a most respectable Inhabitant, who was thrown from his horse, and found dead the next morning.

While mute affection bends beside thy bier,
 Oh ! let the Pastor join his own sad tear ;
 Who learnt a lesson, every Sabbath day,
 From thy mild aspect, and thy locks of grey.

When fortune came, nor avarice, nor pride,
 Lured from the paths of peace thy feet aside,
 That life's low vale still unambitious trod ;
 Thy spirit own'd its home alone with God.
 If aught from Heav'n thy ardent hope could steal,
 It was the joy that tenderest fathers feel.

Thine was the humble, holy mind, in wealth,
 In pain, or ease, in sickness, and in health ;
 Thine was true faith ; not that which, loud and vain,
 Professes Jesus, with the heart of Cain ;
 Nor that which cheats the wav'ring, wand'ring mind,
 For ever SEEKING what it ne'er can find ;
 But faith, composed, and silent, and sincere, }
 Warming the heart, illumining the tear,
 And cheering unfelt age from year to year. }

Though awful was the event that bore thee hence,
 Awful, and ev'n appalling to the sense ;
 Know, Christian, while thy own fleet hour goes by,
 HE DIES TO GOD, WHO LIVES PREPARED TO DIE.



VILLAGE STORIES.

THE
SHEEP-HURDLE MAKER.

IN a beautiful village in the West of England, the traveller, as he passed along, was struck with the neat appearance of a cottage by the way side. It was the humble dwelling of an industrious man, who had raised himself to a comfortable competency by active and steady exertion in his trade, which was that of sheep-hurdle making; he had a wife and six children, three sons and three daughters, all blessed with health, and living in harmony and comfort together. In his own conduct, the father of this happy family was a pattern of Christian integrity; pure and undefiled religion was the ground and motive of all his actions; though distant from his parish church two miles, he was a constant attendant on the word of God, there delivered with plainness and simplicity, nor did he ever allow any frivolous excuse to prevent his coming. To the Minister he always looked up with reverence and affectionate regard; and the happiest hours of his life were those passed in hearing his title to immortal life, through CHRIST his Saviour, unfolded in the house of God. This worthy man had soon cause of worldly uneasiness, arising from the conduct of his children. They had been persuaded, by a certain description of the dismal elect, to believe that a few only are predestined to salvation, and that all, except the predestined,—let their lives be ever so blameless, whether they were good fathers, husbands, and brothers, and fulfilled all the Christian

duties and charities of life, — were, notwithstanding, by God's decree, condemned to eternal torments. Such is the gloomy and frightful doctrine held out by some teachers of the present day. Every endeavour to draw the young and unwary to this sullen society was used; and it was asserted, that those who frequented the parish church, notwithstanding their faith and repentance, were still *dead in trespasses and sin*; that the Minister, if he had gifts, had not grace; and that the only road to salvation lay in forsaking the church, in whose communion the forefathers of the village had lived and died. — This reasoning, though so contrary to the pure and mild spirit of the Gospel, had frequently great weight with the poor and ignorant; whilst novelty, and the love of change, led away the young and careless. Some were pleased with the new mode of singing; some struck with the confidence and vehemence of various preachers, their equals in station; whilst, in consequence of abuse, and libellous publications, widely dispersed, they began to despise the regular form of prayer observed in our church. To the inexpressible grief of the pious and affectionate father, his children were led away by this false reasoning, and vulgar revilings of the resident Minister, who never replied, because he had learnt, when “reviled, to revile not again.” The daughters of the kind parent, who were just rising into womanhood, with their brothers, were no longer seen accompanying their father and mother to the parish church. The Clergyman had long observed this circumstance. One Sunday morning, after divine service, speaking of his steady attendance, he asked the father what was become of his family? Overcome by this simple question, the poor man burst into tears, and said, his children had all, in spite of remonstrances, left the place of worship which he himself would rather die than forsake; because he felt that there all the Bible was laid open, the great and consoling truths of the Gospel were taught, and his hope

was never destroyed, that if he walked humbly with his God, ever remembering to pray for God's grace and heavenly aid, the road to salvation was open to him, as well as others. Some months after this change in his family, owing in great measure to anxiety, the health of this father of a numerous and once happy family began to decline; though his constitution had not been impaired by excesses, nor had the weight of years pressed upon him.

As his strength decayed, his faith and religious hope strengthened; he no longer could walk to his parish church; but so unwilling was he to give up his attendance there, that latterly he rode, whilst the horse was led by one of his neighbours. His days, however, were fast passing away; he could not long bear the motion of riding, and became, a few weeks before his death, confined to his bed; here he was constantly attended by his friend, the Clergyman of the parish, who beheld, with delight and respect, the meek and quiet resignation of this departing Christian; nor was there, in this pious resignation, a spark of presumption. It was not the arrogant assurance of vain men, but the assurance, of which St. Paul speaks, the assurance "of faith, hope," and a good conscience. He indeed knew, and felt, that he was born in sin, had many and great offences against God to deplore, in whose sight "no man living can be justified." He felt, that only through the merits of a merciful Saviour, and "HIM CRUCIFIED," he could trust for pardon. The study of the Gospel had filled him with comfort, not despair; with humble cheerfulness, not with sullen gloom. Our Redeemer is there represented as a mild and merciful judge, saying to the contrite sinner, "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "To CHRIST and Him crucified" he looked up at this trying moment, and was strengthened day by day, in contemplating the nearer approach of

death. He felt inexpressible grace in having the LORD's own prayer on his lips, and in his heart: he repeated with earnestness, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." It was known that he was constantly attended by his Minister, who was indefatigable in comforting him, and offering all the spiritual consolation that could be derived from the word of God. The effects of this were apparent, on the inevitable approach of death: yet, notwithstanding this, there were some Antinomian Calvinists, who used every endeavour to obtrude their dreadful and unscriptural doctrines upon him in his last moments; declaring, with arrogance, that he was not in the road to salvation. To all their distracting arguments, while he had strength, he returned this simple, but firm answer:—"He had been always taught to trust in the word of God, and that only; and was under the care of an affectionate and earnest Minister, and to him only he should look up for religious instruction, not to those who rejected the first stone of the Gospel, humility." Upon a proposal made him to see and converse with one of the preachers of the chapel, he was deeply affected, and said, that nothing could persuade him to have any communication with him; again and again repeating, that he was perfectly satisfied with the prayers and conversation of his own esteemed Minister, at all events he was not disposed to place his reliance on these presumptuous men, whose religion, in opposition to CHRIST, consisted in regarding the mote in their brother's eye, not the "BEAM in their own." His Calvinistic neighbours he did not object to see; and though they beheld the firm faith, the calm resignation, and the humble piety, of this departing Christian, they could not refrain from making the most uncharitable reflections even to his weeping family, declaring him not converted to the true faith, but to such reflections his wife only answered, "Judge

not, and you shall not be judged." You must "*be born again*," they cried, "*you must be able to say, at what time, and under what minister, you first received conviction of being a lost sinner!*" His calm answer was, "Being early instructed in religious faith, I never doubted, since the time I had reason, that I was a sinner, born in sin; and I have no hopes, in this my dying hour, no hopes but in the merits and mercies of a Saviour. I know, also, we must be born again; but as JESUS CHRIST has not thought fit to tell us exactly how, I am not inclined to learn it of you!" The last time he was visited by the clergyman, he feebly thanked him for his long-continued kindness, and heard his last words, "Endure in faith, and hope, to the end:" then took his hand, as with a resigned, but affectionate farewell, and turning his head on the pillow, said, "*I shall now sleep!*" The eyes of this blameless man were apparently closed in death; he had not spoken for many hours, and scarcely gave any signs of existence. The wife of one of the members of the chapel, at this awful moment, began a long and vague conversation about his errors, and obstinate adherence to the church, which, she was sure, would endanger his salvation. The dying man, who they had concluded was in a state of perfect insensibility, opened his eyes; and, as if endowed with supernatural strength, which no doubt was from God, said, with great energy, and firmness of speech, "I am going in peace to be judged by a great and merciful Saviour, and not by presumptuous and uncharitable men:" he then, to the wonder of all around him, spoke for some time, requesting his children never to forsake that church in which they had been brought up; and his last moments were calm and unmoved, as if to show more than any words can describe, this divine sentiment, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." After this effort, he fell

upon his pillow, exhausted ; and, in a few moments afterwards, expired without a groan.

Thus closed in peace the life of this humble, steadfast, and sincere Christian. His piety, and unshaken faith, at this awful moment of death, had due weight with his children : they lamented that they had ever left that pure form of worship, in which they had been christened, and brought up ; and resolved, when they looked for the last time upon the breathless corpse of their beloved parent, to return to that communion, in whose pure doctrines their father had lived and died. He was buried in a neighbouring town, where many of his ancestors rested. His minister, struck with his piety, firm faith, and unshaken fortitude, has commemorated his humble worth by the following epitaph : —

EPITAPH,

ON

, of

WILTS.

Written by the Minister who attended him constantly in his last illness.

In remembrance of _____, of _____, in this Parish, who, with FAITH which nothing could shake, with HOPE, full of immortality, and in perfect CHARITY with all men, closed his eyes on this world, AUGUST 8th, 1815, AGED 50 YEARS : leaving a widowed Wife and numerous Family, which he bred up, though in an humble station of life, to competence and comfort, and in the fear and love of God.

How quiet is the bed of Death,
Where the departing CHRISTIAN lies !
Kind Angels watch his short'ning breath,
And wait to close his weary eyes.

A moment—and that conscious mind
Shall cease to warm its living seat ;—
One moment—and that heart so kind !
Shall cease—for ever—cease to beat !

CHILDREN, who mark the grassy sod,
With eyes, perhaps, by weeping, dim,
HERE SLEEPS YOUR FATHER ! pray to God
That you may live and die like him.

THE
YOUNG SHOPKEEPER.

THE calm and happy end of the Hurdle Maker was strongly contrasted, by the life and death of a shopkeeper, who expired about the same time, and whose history I shall now relate. He was born of respectable parents, and had the advantages of a good, plain education. His father and mother were members of the same Antinomian chapel, and lived in a small clothing town, where, unfortunately, the habits of the lower order of people are particularly corrupt; this, in some measure, may be accounted for, by the total neglect which prevails, in most manufacturing places, of moral instruction to the poor. At a very early age they are taken and placed in situations which preclude them from the many advantages which are now so generally held out by the establishment of schools, in great numbers, in almost every part of the kingdom. The advantages attending them are too striking to need observation; but these advantages do not extend to the little helpless beings that are shut up in manufactories; they grow up there, surrounded by bad examples; and neglect of every moral duty, of course, soon introduces dangerous vices. The church is almost always neglected by this class of people; and if they do attend any place of worship, they are generally to be found at some of those evening meetings, where too often are taught the dangerous and fallible doctrines of good works being of no value in the sight of God.

loved parent consigned to the grave, with anguish and self-reproach. At last he began to rouse himself from this afflicting state of mind, and to revolve in his thoughts what he should do for his widowed mother. A worthy tradesman in the town had remarked the deep grief of the young man; and, though he was acquainted with all his former irregular habits, he felt great pity, and a strong inclination to serve him, and therefore offered him the place of shopman in his family. This, of course, was eagerly and thankfully accepted: and matters so arranged, that his mother, by selling the few effects that remained, was put in possession of a little retired home, which she hoped the future industry of her son would secure to her. He began again, as it were, his career in life; he thought of his father, and that thought stimulated him to exertion; he became sober, industrious, and attentive in the shop, and his master had no cause of complaint whatever. His health, which had been sensibly injured by his irregular manner of life, and the affliction he felt at his father's death, now began to amend. In this delightful course he continued a few months; at the end of that period his master died, leaving a daughter and two sons to inherit his property. The daughter had long felt an affection for the young man, and that affection was mutual; the brothers, who had witnessed his diligent and sober conduct, did not oppose the union of their sister; and a twelvemonth after the death of his worthy master, he was married to the daughter, and established in a comfortable little shop. His mother was not forgotten, and, by the cheerful consent of his wife, removed to her son's house. Let any person conceive what must have been her feelings of delight at seeing an only child, who a twelvemonth before was given up to idleness, and all its attendant vices, now wearing a cheerful aspect, settled in a comfortable business, and married to a wife who loved him with the truest affection. These happy days, however, did not continue. Pros-

perity, unless tempered with humility, is a dangerous gift; and so our Saviour considered it, when he tells his disciples, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The young shopkeeper too soon began to relax in his sober and steady habits. He had now a house of his own; and it was hard, indeed, if he could not then afford to have his friends about him. He did so at first with moderation; but his wife soon observed with alarm that he frequently absented himself for many hours, when his presence was required in the shop; and in the evening, when the business of the day was done, he was seldom to be found at his own peaceful home, enjoying the society of that wife, to whose kindness he was indebted for all he possessed. At first he was alive to the gentle remonstrances that were used with him, and he would for a few days continue quiet and sober at his house, and watch with delight his little smiling boy in the arms of his mother. However, the good seed had no root in him; for a time it flourished, but soon withered away. By degrees he gradually fell into all his former vices; the agony of his wife, the imploring looks of his mother, he no longer attended to, but plunged deeper and deeper into excesses. He was almost always intoxicated, and left the business of the shop entirely to his wife, who beheld with despair their trade failing, and the money which should have supported her and her children (for she had now two) squandered away in alehouses; from which receptacles of vice he seldom returned till he was in a state of complete intoxication. This constant fever of the body impaired his health as well as temper: he now grew sullen, morose, and bitter in all his ways and actions; and his usage of his wife at times showed almost the nature of a savage. I have mentioned, in the beginning of this story, that his father and mother were frequenters of one of these Antinomian meeting-houses: the old man had passed through life, without

much thinking of religion ; he heard it frequently said, that any other mode of prayer would endanger his salvation ; and that the Gospel was not preached in churches : the truth of which he did not take the trouble to examine, but took it for granted that what his Minister told him was right. He did not reflect that the doctrines he heard were contrary to the mild and benevolent precepts of the Son of God, who constantly, in all his proverbs and divine sayings, inculcates universal charity to all mankind. St. Paul, following his great Master's footsteps, speaks and instructs his hearers in the same manner. What can be more beautiful than the description he gives, in the Corinthians, of charitable feelings ! " Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." The doctrines the old man heard were very different from these beautiful and instructive precepts : however, he did not stop to examine his Bible, nor could he, had he been asked, have given any reason for his faith. His latter days, as we have seen, were clouded with sorrow, and his thoughts at the awful hour of death were more directed to the misery of leaving his darling child, than to any religious fears or hopes of the future. His son, who was more ardent in all his feelings, who rushed into evil with the greatest impetuosity, and then would stop and shudder at the precipice before him, had not strength of mind, after his second lapse into sin, to struggle with his vices, which had now the complete mastery over him. He constantly attended the chapel, but there nothing soothed and comforted his troubled mind : he heard it asserted, that from the beginning a few only were predestined to eternal life, the rest to everlasting torments. He must, therefore, he feared, be of the latter number, let his repentance be ever so sincere ; what good, therefore,

would accrue from laying aside his vices. He generally left the chapel full of the most gloomy thoughts, and drowned all reflection in drunkenness and riot. The miseries of his wife and infant family he did not consider himself as the author of. God had predestined all his actions; he was therefore only a machine, with no power of his own to do right or wrong: but though from this dreadful doctrine he could look with selfish apathy upon the sufferings he had caused, he could not with the same calmness contemplate his end, which would consign him to endless torments. That important Christian virtue; hope, which St. Paul puts next to faith, according to the strict Calvinistic sense, can have no place in the mind; for there it is either presumption or despair. This wretched young man at last, overcome by his intemperate habits, began to exhibit symptoms of a rapid decline. He presented, at this trying moment, a perfect contrast to the pious and resigned Hurdlemaker. As his strength declined, his horror at the thoughts of what he was predestined to suffer was inconceivably dreadful. He had no comfort in prayer, because, according to his religious creed, it could avail nothing. His flushed cheek, his starting eye, and lips parched with fever, his restless impatience under restraint, filled his relations and friends, who surrounded his death-bed, with dismay. Sometimes, if a medicine was presented to him, he would dash the vial in pieces, and call out, with a hollow peremptory voice, for strong liquors; and if he were indulged in this wish, (for as he was past hope, it was useless to oppose him,) he would, after sipping the cordial, throw it away, and bitterly upbraid his friends for endeavouring to hasten his end. That awful moment at last arrived: he became insensible, but this insensibility did not calm his horrors; his inward and incoherent speeches betrayed the agonies of his mind; and though he no longer knew his weeping friends, they had the misery of observing that

horror and despair had fast hold of him, and left him not, till nature, quite exhausted by such bodily and mental sufferings, resigned him to the arms of death.

We have in the history of this young man a striking and awful example of the mischievous effects of that religious creed, which banishes hope from the human mind, and in consequence of which man is taught to look up to the Maker of the world, not as to a father that pitieth his own children, but to a relentless and stern judge, that withholds all pardon and mercy. To show how delusive and dangerous these doctrines are, I need only mention COWPER, one of the most amiable and exemplary men that can be pointed out. The following was written when his mind was obscured by the mists of enthusiasm :—

“ Friends and ministers said much,
 The Gospel to enforce ;
 But my blindness still was such,
 I chose a legal course.
 Much I fasted, watch’d, and strove,
 Scarce would I show my face abroad ;
 Fear’d almost to speak and move,
 A stranger still to God.
 Thus afraid to trust His grace,
 Long time I did rebel ;
 Still despairing of my case,
 Down at His feet I fell.
 Then my stubborn heart He broke,
 And subdu’d me to His sway ;
 By a simple word He spoke,
 Thy sins are done away.”

But these warm and delightful feelings were not realised ; for this amiable and excellent man’s last moments were embittered by the deepest despair of that mercy he has, in the hymn before us, so pathetically described, as having found, where, indeed, alone we can find it, — at the foot of the cross.

THE
POOR COTTAGERS.

IN the same beautiful village where the Hurdlemaker resided dwelt a worthy pair; their humble neat cottage stood embowered with wood, and commanding a great extent of beautiful country, hill and dale, interspersed with the mansions of the great and opulent. The village church, seen partially rising in the midst of these peaceful scenes, made the retreat of the poor cottagers a sweet and interesting subject for the pencil of the artist, particularly if he could have arrived at that happy moment when the labours of the day were ended, and witnessed the old man enjoying the glowing landscape, on a summer evening, at the porch of his cottage, over which the woodbine was trailed, and formed a bower of great simplicity and sweetness. It is pleasant to contemplate worth in every station; and the peaceful inhabitants of this cottage presented an example which might with propriety be held up for imitation. Let us trace the actions of both from their youth to their declining years, now fast hastening them to that "bourne, from whence no traveller returns." The old man was the son of an industrious labourer, who worked hard to maintain a wife and five children: they all grew up, following the same humble occupation as their father; but this son only survived to close the eyes of his aged parents, and found himself, at the age of two and twenty, alone in the world, death having torn from him his four brothers, who all died in the prime of their youth and

strength, and the father and mother soon followed them to the grave. He was now the sole occupier of the cottage, which had been purchased by his father, though only a day-labourer; but he was enabled to save some of his honest earnings by his sober and frugal habits, which never allowed him to frequent alehouses, and waste his money and time in destructive habits of drunkenness and idleness. The cottager trod in the steps of his father, and was an example of sobriety of manners and conduct. He soon married a respectable young woman, who made him a kind and affectionate wife. But it is not the lot of mortals to pass through life without sorrow and losses: the young man's sunshine was soon overclouded by the illness of his wife. She had brought him three children, and some months after the birth of the last her health declined, and she soon showed symptoms of consumption. The young man beheld, with deep affliction, the daily wasting strength of his beloved partner: he looked at his little ones, and sighed with bitterness to think they would soon have no mother to protect them. In the midst of his grief he found the greatest comfort from the visits of the clergyman of his parish, who came very frequently to offer religious consolation to the departing wife of the young cottager. She was resigned and calm; her mind was not distracted by vain doubts or fears; she had been taught, from her earliest youth, by a pious mother, that faith and good works cannot be separated. She had seen the peaceful and happy end of this excellent parent, and showed by her conduct that she had cherished all those principles which had been taught her; and now that she lay on the bed of death, soon to be snatched away, in the prime of her years, from those tender ties which so powerfully attach one to life, she found the greatest consolation in reflecting, that her short life had been unmarked with any flagrant offences. Errors, no doubt, she had, and many; but the Gospel taught her to look up and

trust to the mercies of a kind and tender Father, who "knows whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust and ashes." The Bible was continually read to her, and passages selected from it by the clergyman, particularly adapted to strengthen her FAITH and resignation at this trying moment. The death-bed of this young creature presented an useful lesson to all around her; her mind composed, and filled with heavenly hope. No doubt it was a bitter pang to part with a tender husband, and helpless little ones; but nothing could happen in this world without the immediate interposition of Providence. God had granted her but few years, but they were years of happiness, for which she was thankful; and, no doubt for good and wise ends, was now removing her, she trusted, and humbly hoped, to a higher state of existence. In this comfortable frame of mind the young woman continued for some weeks, and was able, by her patient and pious example, to compose and strengthen the mind of her afflicted partner. Death at last released her from her earthly sufferings; but so gentle was his mandate, that she expired without a groan, and it was some time before her weeping friends could persuade themselves that the spark of life was extinct; her looks were so placid, that she appeared only to be in a peaceful sleep. The afflicted young cottager at first was given up to the bitterest grief; his little ones would sit upon his knee, and rend his heart by their innocent enquiries respecting their mother; they wanted to know why she remained sleeping so long, and why they might not steal into the room, and kiss her whilst she slept, and a hundred other questions as artless and innocent. The day of the funeral at last arrived; her coffin was dressed with the early flowers of spring; a smile of serenity and peace played upon her pallid countenance, and divested death of all its terrors. She had requested that a psalm might be sung at her funeral, and had selected and pointed out to her hus-

band these verses in the New Version, which are as follow : —

“ THOU turnest man, O LORD, to dust,
Of which he first was made ;
And when thou speak'st the word, Return,
'Tis instantly obey'd.

“ For in thy sight a thousand years
Are like a day that's pass'd ;
Or like a watch in dead of night,
Whose hours unminded waste.

“ Thou sweep'st us off as with a flood,
We vanish hence like dreams ;
At first we grow like grass that feels
The sun's reviving beams.

“ But howsoever fresh and fair
Its morning beauty shows ;
'Tis all cut down, and wither'd quite,
Before the evening close.”

At last the awful moment arrived when this young and fair creature was to be seen no more in this world ; the husband had taken his last agonising look of her ; the coffin lid was screwed down, and the mournful procession began to move from the cottage, which was at a considerable distance from the parish church. There was something particularly striking and affecting in this sad solemnity, which was greatly heightened by hearing, at intervals, the sad and solemn knell. The young cottager carried his infant child in his arms, whilst the two others were led by the sister of his departed wife, and some more respectable friends followed. The mournful ceremony was performed, with great solemnity, by the minister of the parish, who could not read this beautiful service without emotion, nor behold, unmoved, the grief of the poor young cottager, and his infant family : the solemn strain of the funeral psalm, selected by the departed young woman, was sung with peculiar effect, and filled every heart with devotional awe ; but when the corpse was lowered into its last narrow home, and the solemn words repeated

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes," every eye was turned upon the young man, whose heart was rent with the most bitter grief; and his sobs and streaming eyes drew compassion from all the bystanders. A little time after the funeral, the clergyman called upon the afflicted widower, and found him sitting in a melancholy posture: in his once happy cottage his youngest child was sleeping in the cradle, and the two others were playing before the door, too young to be touched by the sorrow that had taken possession of their father. The cottager rose upon seeing the clergyman, who, with great kindness, talked to him of his future prospects: he did not with harshness condemn the tears that continued to flow for his late loss, but he with gentleness recommended resignation to the divine will, and pointed out the sources from whence that consolation should flow. He also reminded him of the calm and happy end of his wife, and what comfort she received; in her departing moments, in reflecting that, from his excellent character and sober habits of industry, her children would never be neglected: if he therefore gave way to hopeless grief, he could not fulfil this important duty. The worthy clergyman pressed upon him to renew his daily occupations. Every word that was spoken by this excellent man had due weight with the young cottager; in a few days he returned to his usual labours; he got a careful old woman to watch his children during his absence; and their smiles and innocent prattle, when he returned at night, soothed and comforted him. Time wore away; and we find the cottager once more in possession of domestic happiness: he chose a respectable young woman for his second wife, who took the greatest care of his children: she brought him only one, and that died in its infancy; her undivided attention was therefore bestowed upon her husband's children; and so kind and affectionate was she to them, that they never felt what it was to want a mother's care.

PART II.

HAVING followed the young man through his youthful days, let us contemplate his character in his declining age. His sons were all now grown up, and had left their paternal home. The youngest sought his fortune as a soldier, and nothing was heard of him for many years. One evening, as this worthy pair were enjoying the freshness of the air at their cottage door, a limping emaciated figure approached them, young, but apparently bowed down by sickness: "Father, don't you know me?" was uttered in a tone of voice that immediately made the old man recognise his son, whom he thought had long ago been numbered with the dead. The joy of the worthy pair was extreme; all now was bustle in the cottage; the old woman busily employed in getting ready a bed for the sick young soldier; and the best fare the cottage could afford was soon prepared by the same careful hand, and placed upon a little deal table before him. He had been wounded, and kept in a French prison for some years, but at last made his escape, and begged his way to his father's house; there he remained for some months, and soon recovered his health. Solomon says, "The sin of ingratitude is worse than witchcraft," and this odious vice soon made its appearance in the conduct of the soldier: all the kindness of his father was forgotten, he became morose and sullen if he did not supply him with money to spend at the alehouse; in short, by little and little, the poor old cottager became involved in debt by the rapaciousness of this unworthy child. He was also, at this time, oppressed by an afflicting complaint. His wife beheld with the deepest concern his sufferings of mind and body, and could not look back without a sigh upon those peaceful days that had passed: she had hailed with peculiar pleasure the return of the young soldier, and cheerfully watched and

nursed him during his sickness, little thinking that his heart would allow him to make such an ungrateful return to her and his aged father. He had now, for some time, left his home, having drained the poor cottagers of all the little wealth they possessed; they were both sitting together one morning, and thinking what in the cottage they could most easily part with, to afford them some relief in their present necessity, when a surly-looking man entered the house, and told the old man he must follow him instantly to gaol, unless he paid a debt which had been contracted in his name by his son; and that it had been determined, in a neighbouring town, that the debt was lawful. The aged couple were thunderstruck by this fresh proof of their son's ingratitude; the old man lifted up his eyes to heaven, saying, "The LORD's will be done!" and then, turning with a firm look to his hard-hearted creditor, said, "he would go to gaol, for the debt was not his; and even if he had wherewithal to pay it, he would not, as he considered it unjust and arbitrary in the extreme." His poor wife, in the mean time, was weeping bitterly at the idea of her old man being torn from her in the midst of winter, and in his feeble state exposed to all the rigours of a prison. They had been married nearly fifty years, and during all that length of time had lived together in the most perfect harmony; indeed, they were both so beloved and respected, that it was with great difficulty a cart could be procured to convey the old cottager to prison, all the neighbours commiserating his fate, and refusing to lend any assistance to the hard-hearted creditor; however, after some difficulty a conveyance was procured, and the poor old man was assisted into the cart by his weeping wife: he begged her to take comfort in the reflection, that he was not going as a guilty person to gaol, and he trusted he should soon return to her and his peaceful home. The poor woman could only answer by her tears, and stood with streaming eyes watching the slow movement of the

cart as it drove from the door till it was out of sight. She then entered her solitary cottage, and, sitting down in her accustomed seat, gave free vent to her tears. Her busy fancy represented to her her aged husband, sick and in prison, in the midst of winter, wanting all those little comforts which her kindness and attention had for so many years administered to him: the idea was terrible, and she continued to weep for her old man, and wish she could be allowed to endure all these privations for him. A hope for a moment stole across her mind, that when his infirm and tottering state was seen, pity would restore him to her. This hope, however, was but momentary; his hard-hearted creditor, like Gallio, whom St. Paul speaks of, "cared for none of these things." At last it occurred to her that her only chance of rescuing her husband from his perilous situation would be to state the case herself to the minister of the parish, who constantly resided upon his living, and was ready to assist his poor neighbours in temporal as well as spiritual concerns. Hastily drying up her tears, she set out upon her walk, and soon reached the parsonage. To her great joy she found the clergyman at home; to him, therefore, she told her plain and artless tale; and when she spoke of her old man, as she called him, it was with all the affection and warm feelings of youth.—It was impossible to be unmoved by her affecting story; and though the evening was fast closing in, she had so strongly interested the clergyman in her favour, that he set out immediately for the neighbouring town, where the aged prisoner was to rest for the night. The minister stated the case to the parties concerned, and pleaded earnestly for the poor cottager thus hurried away, in the midst of winter, for a debt not his own: however, finding all he said of no avail, he came to the resolution of discharging the debt. When he communicated his intention to the poor old man, he thanked him most respectfully, but entreated with

great firmness to suffer him to go to gaol. The debt, he said, had never been contracted by his consent, and he was not dismayed at the thoughts of a few weeks' imprisonment, which it was better he should suffer than his hard-hearted creditor receive money which, he must know, he was not justly entitled to from him: but when the clergyman represented the misery his aged wife would endure, by a separation which would remove him far from her to a prison, in the depth of winter, the tender recollection of her sorrow melted him into tears, and he thankfully accepted the proffered kindness. The debt was accordingly paid, but the evening was too far advanced to allow of the old man's return to his cottage till the next morning. In the mean time the poor woman returned home, comforted by the hope that the kind exertions of the minister would secure the release of her husband. The wintry sun cast its departing beams as she reached her cottage. All there was silent and solitary; she could not refrain from tears on seeing the old beehive chair, which her husband used to repose himself in after the fatigues of the day, now empty. Upon a little shelf, just over the chair, was his Bible, and the chapter that they had read together the evening before, was pointed out by his spectacles being laid in the book, to mark the place where he had left off. The little garden, also, as she went to close and lock the door for the evening, brought back all her sorrows; there lay his spade near a patch of potatoes, which he had in the morning been using his feeble endeavours to dig up for their winter use. The old woman wept bitterly at returning to the house, and the evening was in unison with her feelings. The wind blew hollow, and her little casement window shook with the approaching storm. She sat shivering over the dying embers of her small fire, till its almost total extinction roused her from her melancholy train of thought, and she retired to her solitary bed, but not without a fervent

prayer to the Father of Mercies, that He would protect and restore to her her aged and beloved husband. The next morning she locked up her cottage, and, with a beating heart, set off for the parsonage, to learn what success the minister had had. Just as she had reached the house, almost breathless with expectation, she was told that her husband was released, and was now slowly ascending the hill. All her sorrows were in a moment forgotten; she ran to the spot, and beheld her dear old man climbing with difficulty the steep ascent. In a moment she was by his side. Who could behold the joy of this aged pair without emotion! They soon reached the parsonage, and there again renewed their pious and artless gratitude to their benefactor, for having, by his bounty, restored them to each other; and they departed, praying that every blessing might light upon him. This worthy pair still live in their peaceful cottage, a pattern of kindness and affectionate attention to each other; their daily petition to the Father of Mercies is, that their earthly pilgrimage might terminate at the same moment, so that, "even in death, they may not be divided."

THE VILLAGE FIRE,

OR

THE IDIOT BOY;

A TALE FROM REAL LIFE.

IN that village, the simple annals of a few of whose inhabitants have already been recorded, dwelt a cheerful old man and his wife; their little neat cottage stood upon the brow of a hill, which looked over a large extent of rich and fertile fields; above appeared the village spire, with the pastor's house and sloping garden before it. The old cottager was the son of respectable parents, who, after being visited by a long train of misfortunes, which wasted all their worldly substance, at length died, leaving their only child to struggle with sorrow and poverty. He was consigned to the workhouse, and was fortunate enough to fall into humane hands: his orphan state was commiserated: he was treated with kindness, and taught to read; and the clergyman of the parish often noticed him, and rewarded him for his attentive and quiet behaviour at church. As he grew towards manhood, he engaged himself in the service of a neighbouring farmer; and by his fidelity, sobriety, and steady upright conduct, gained the respect and confidence of his employer. After some years spent in the service of this master, finding himself possessed, in consequence of honest industry, of a few pounds, he thought, with this slender provision, and by the aid of his own industrious habits, he could maintain a wife. He had long liked a young

woman, who lived as servant at a neighbouring farm house. When first he became acquainted with her, they were both extremely young, and each engaged in respectable service, and were prudent enough to defer their marriage till they had some little means to begin with, and provide for the wants of a rising family. It would be well if their prudent example were more generally followed; but that honest pride which used to keep the poor cottager in former days from seeking parish relief, and made him struggle with many and great privations, rather than have recourse to it; that virtuous, independent feeling, by the pressure of the times, and other circumstances, is now rapidly passing away, and many a gay and smiling group are now going to the pay-board, who, frequently, when their claims are looked into, have only to allege, that their neighbour receives parish relief, and therefore why should not they apply, and take their chance of getting money from the same source? One striking and fatal effect of this reasoning is, the frequent marriages of very young people, who think not of the future wants of a family; and if they do look forward, it is only to contemplate, what relief the birth of each child will entitle them to receive from the parish. Nothing has engaged the attention of the enlightened public more than the state of the Poor Laws; the evils resulting from them in their present form are of no small magnitude, and hitherto have baffled all the attempts of the legislature to reform. In some instances, no doubt, much good would result from the farmers giving higher wages for labour, nor would they in the end be losers by this means, as the poor rates would be considerably lessened by such a measure, and the temptation to seek for parish relief almost done away. This, and putting down all unnecessary public houses, which prove too frequently the bane and ruin of many an innocent family; and, when practicable, letting the labourer have a small portion of land, I cannot help

thinking, would, if carried into effect, do much to better the condition of the poor. But to return to my story. The cottager married, and removed to the house of his father-in-law, who was pleased to see his daughter the wife of so industrious and sober a young man. The old and young people lived together in great harmony for many years, and the former witnessed the birth of many grandchildren. At the death of the old people, the small cottage and household goods became the property of the cottager in right of his wife. Nothing could exceed the neatness with which every thing was kept, and the veneration they had for the old high-backed chairs, and various other ancient pieces of furniture, which had descended from father to son for more than a century, and had been as carefully kept as a miser hoards his treasure. Without doors the habits of cheerful industry were to be seen: when the cottager returned from the labours of the day, he was always to be found, in a summer's evening, till the sun went down, in his garden at work, surrounded by his children, who endeavoured, by their infant toils, to get an approving look from their father. Their mother, in the mean while, was preparing their supper; and this happy family, after their frugal meal was finished, did not retire to rest till their little ones had knelt around them, and lisped the Lord's Prayer, and one for protection from all the dangers of the night, which their mother had taught them, and which they never omitted to repeat to their parents, on their knees, with their little hands pressed together. When they had finished, the father was surrounded by his infant ones, all eager to climb his knee, and receive his commendation and kisses. This worthy pair were much respected by a neighbouring farmer, who found constant employment for the husband; and his boys, as they grew big enough, were all employed by the same kind master: nor was the wife forgotten; she assisted at the farm as often as she could spare time from the

occupation which the wants of a rising family gave her. She was now very near being confined with her tenth child; but as she was, in spite of her situation, still active and strong, she continued to go with her husband and part of her family to the farm-house. One morning when she was employed there in washing, she was startled by violent screams; she ran into the house as fast as she could, to know the cause, when, shocking to relate! a little son of the farmer's, about two years old, whom she had seen only a few minutes before running backward and forward in sight of his mother, with all the sportive gaiety of infancy, now lay in its parent's lap a lifeless corpse! The death of the little innocent had been caused by a small pail of water having been left inadvertently in front of the door. The weather being frosty, it was slightly covered with ice: the child, in the short absence of its mother, went probably to sit down on the edge, and by this means found a watery grave. The cottager's wife, upon hearing the screams, and seeing the body of the child, was so overcome with terror, that she rushed out of the house, and had walked some little distance before the cruelty of her conduct in leaving the poor mother, without endeavouring to assist and comfort her, struck her; she hastily returned, and every effort was resorted to in vain to recover the spark of life—it had fled for ever! And the gay little smiling infant, who but a short time before had been the joy and delight of its parents, now lay silent and cold before them, and exhibited one of the many striking proofs of the uncertainty of life and the instability of all earthly happiness!

From the time of this fatal accident, to the delivery of the cottager's wife, she continued so ill as to cause serious apprehensions that the life of herself or child would fall a sacrifice to the fright she had experienced; and as the husband trembled at the idea of losing the kind and affectionate mother of his infant family; so the poor man's joy seemed hardly to know any bounds

when he found his wife safe from her perils, with a strong and healthy boy at her side. Though the cottager was a most affectionate father to all his children, he seemed, and the mother also, more than usually attached to this child: it had been brought into the world when his mind was oppressed with the terror of losing his wife, and he had sat many a night, after the toil of the day was finished, anticipating all the misery such a loss would bring upon him. To find himself, therefore, suddenly relieved from these painful apprehensions, more than commonly endeared the infant, whose birth had not been followed by any calamitous event. Ah! little did this humble pair think, when they sat by their cottage fire, contemplating with delight their sleeping boy as it lay in its mother's lap, that an evil of far greater magnitude than its death awaited them. Till the child was three or four years old, the fond parents remarked nothing singular about him: he spoke not; though, when he was placed upon his father's knee, and words were often repeated to him, he would try to imitate the sounds he heard; but power of speech was denied him, nor did he utter one plain word till he was eight years old. The joy of his parents may be easily conceived when he first called upon them by name, and could ask for the things he wanted; but their joy was short-lived; as they soon perceived, though he had now acquired the faculty of speech, the mind remained almost a perfect blank, and he seemed to be hardly alive to any other feeling but that of want of food; for this he was almost continually clamorous, and after he had received it, would sink into a kind of disturbed sleep. The only thing that could rouse him in some degree from this insensibility, was the endeavour of his parents to employ him; he would then make great resistance, and run and hide himself from them, and then, in a few minutes afterwards, as if no trace remained upon his mind of what had so lately passed, would sit down, and fix his eyes upon

his weeping mother, without being moved either by pity or surprise, at her lamentation over her idiot boy. Two or three medical men having heard of the child's situation, from curiosity visited him, and all pronounced that the defect of understanding was incurable.

The melancholy state of their son was a misfortune of a very bitter kind to this humble pair; but as it was a dispensation of Providence, they bowed with resignation to his awful and mysterious will, and looked for comfort to the rest of their children. They had buried three, six were grown up, and established in respectable services. The idiot boy alone remained with his parents: he was now advancing towards manhood, and presented a melancholy picture of human weakness; his eyes, which were large and prominent, always seemed rolling about, without any fixed object. His father generally took him with him into the field where he worked, but he did not like this sort of restraint, and would show some degree of cunning in the means he would take to avoid observation, and escape into the little narrow lane that led to his father's house: there, near a shallow brook, would the poor idiot boy sit for hours together, throwing in pebbles, and clapping his hands as the sound of their falling reached his ears; indeed, this seemed to be almost the only pleasure his vacant mind was capable of receiving. As he had never betrayed any mischievous tendency, his father did not feel uneasy when he missed him from the field; and at his return at night he generally found the idiot boy collecting stones for his favourite amusement, or sitting by the brook watching the ruffling of the stream. A summer of unusual beauty and warmth, which had enriched the fields by a profusion of luxuriant crops, was now hastening to its close; but only by the shortening days could the change be perceived: the weather reminded "the sun-burnt sickleman," as he returned weary from his work, of those seasons, which, in years back, used not to be uncommon, but

now was considered as a sort of wonder, and, as such, afforded conversation to the villagers as they sat at their cottage doors, after the labours of the day were over, enjoying the cool breezes of evening; each calling to his recollection how many years had passed since they had seen such weather; whilst the old grandfather, bending upon his staff, would join in the conversation, and almost with an air of triumph tell of the many years he remembered that were like the present; indeed, it was a difficult matter to make him allow that even this season of uncommon beauty *quite* equalled the summers of his youth.

One morning, early in September, the old cottager, as usual, set out to his accustomed work in a field not very distant from his cottage, and took the idiot boy with him. His wife, after having carefully extinguished the fire, locked up her house, and proceeded to the farm, the inhabitants of which had for so many years employed her. The sun was shining upon the white walls of her peaceful home, as she turned to rest herself when she had gained the summit of the hill: ah! little did she think, as her eyes rested upon the scenes of her infancy, that in a few hours that beloved spot would be a scene of desolation by means of her idiot boy! He had, as usual, gone with his father to the field, and having stayed patiently with him for many hours, watched an opportunity of returning home. After he had amused himself at the brook, he strolled towards the cottage; but not finding the door open, he gained entrance at the window, and seeing no fire, he took down the tinder-box, which he had often seen his mother do, and soon made a blaze; pleased with what he had done, he called a little boy to him, a grandson of his father's, and made him help to collect sticks, and they both proceeded to an out-house, where they placed their flaming materials. Every thing was extremely dry, from the long-continued fine weather; and the flames they had kindled soon communicated to the

house: seeing their bonfire so rapidly increase, the little boy became frightened, and ran to give the alarm to a neighbouring cottage, whilst the poor idiot kept watching the devouring element, and clapping his hands with apparent delight. The alarm of fire was soon given, though speedy assistance could not be easily obtained, as all the men in the immediate neighbourhood were working in the fields: the keys of the belfrey were, however, quickly obtained, and the dreadful fire-bell gave notice of the calamity! All was now hurry and consternation; men, women, and children, hastening to the spot from whence the flames proceeded, and were throwing up volumes of smoke: there were few idle spectators of this calamity; all seemed animated with a friendly desire of rendering some service; the women ran and filled pails of water at the brook; whilst some of the men, almost at the hazard of their lives, tore off the burning thatch, others attempted to save part of the furniture, but were driven back by the heat and volumes of smoke that now issued from all parts of the premises. The poor cottager had caught the sound of the fire-bell, and, throwing down his spade, hastily moved towards his house, flattering himself that the calamity could not have begun there. As he hastened on with trembling steps, and had got to a point that commanded a view of that part of the village where his cottage stood, what was his grief and consternation on seeing flames issuing from every part of it! he wrung his hands with agony; his house and furniture were all the worldly possessions he had, and he could never hope to replace them. These thoughts crossed his mind as with tottering steps he advanced towards the spot. His neighbours flocked around him, some to comfort, others with breathless impatience to give him all the particulars of the conduct of the idiot boy. The poor old man was so overcome with the sight of his burning cottage, and by the means that led to this calamity, that he could only bow his head

in speechless agony; and resting himself upon the stump of an old tree just opposite his late happy dwelling, the tears rolled in large drops down his aged cheeks. In a few minutes after he had reached this spot, the roof fell in with a hollow crash, which seemed to go to the poor man's heart. Many of the most respectable inhabitants of the village were collected round the spot; and no exertion was wanting, even at the risk of great personal danger, to quench the flames; but that being found impossible, their next endeavour was to console and assist the sorrowing man. He was now without a home, without food, and without money; the night was closing in, and his wife was still absent, and ignorant of this calamitous event: to break it to her was now his first thought; and a respectable neighbour undertook the task to meet her about a mile from the cottage hastening home that she might prepare her husband's supper against his return from work. She was immediately told that there was a fire in the village: the poor woman expressed great concern: "Thank God!" said she, "our house must be safe, as it stands by itself; I have got the key in my pocket, and always take care to rake out every morsel of fire before I lock it up." As she said this, she looked in her companion's face, and saw by his look of pity that all was not so secure as she wished. The truth in a moment struck her; she spoke not, but quickly passed on to a rising ground, from which she had a full view of the cottage. Alas! its white walls no longer glittered to the sun, but in their room appeared a mass of ruins darkly seen through the trees, whilst large columns of smoke still continued to ascend. The poor woman was so overcome by this unexpected misfortune, that it seemed to overturn all her faculties. She uttered no complaint; no tear wetted her cheek; but she continued to stand and gaze upon this scene of desolation, with a look so vacant and so wild as to make her companion almost fear for her senses.

Whilst he was revolving in his mind what step he should take to rouse her from this state, the poor old cottager, alarmed at his wife's not returning, was seen slowly coming towards the spot where they stood. The moment her eyes rested upon her husband, a violent flood of tears came to her relief, and she hastily advanced to meet him. As they walked slowly towards the village, attended by many a sorrowing neighbour, the old man endeavoured to console his weeping wife: he told her, that, though their Pastor was now absent, he was expected home the next day; and he had seen one from the parsonage who had given him consolation and assistance, and an assurance that a subscription would be put on foot to relieve them; their immediate wants had already not been forgotten. "Therefore, take heart," said the old man: "our lot is hard; but remember what we have read together so often in the Bible, 'The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD.' These were the words of Job; and what are our afflictions compared with his? We have lost, indeed, all our worldly possessions, and can hardly hope to raise enough to build up our house again; but we have kind friends, and must not murmur, but put our trust in God." Thus reasoned this excellent old man; but his wife had not so much strength of mind; she continued to weep, and when she reached the parsonage her looks were so wild, and her thoughts so distracted, that it was impossible to reason her into any kind of composure; and she would, had she been allowed to follow her own inclination, have remained all night by the smoky ruins. The first dawn of day found her at the spot; the idiot boy, the cause of all her misfortunes, was by her side; but when she looked in his face, and considered the infirmity he was afflicted with, a mother's heart easily forgave him; and, indeed, she strove to persuade herself that his little companion must have suggested the idea of the bonfire. Be that as it may, the idiot

boy followed the steps of his mother round the ruins, and as he gazed in vacancy about, seemed wholly unconscious of having been the cause of this misfortune.

Upon the pastor's return, he drew up a short statement of the case, which he put into the old man's hands; and it was agreed that he should come every evening to the parsonage, and deposit, for security's sake the gainings of the day. The old man was very successful in his own immediate neighbourhood: his good character, his blameless and quiet conduct, were well known, and had gained him many friends, who proved themselves so in this his hour of affliction. At some houses distant from his own village, he had to contend with some bitter rebuffs; the truth of his story was doubted; servants refused to deliver his petition, upon the plea that they had orders to receive no papers from beggars; others kept him waiting, saying that their master was employed and could not be spoken to, but that he might wait, which sometimes the poor old man did for many hours in a cold and wintry day, and then received his dismissal without the relief he petitioned for: these were hard trials for the honest cottager, who had never before been under the necessity of soliciting relief from door to door. In one instance he met with singular good fortune: having applied at a clergyman's house, some miles distant from his native village, the servant refused to deliver the petition, and closed the door abruptly upon him. The old man, as he was moving slowly away, more in sorrow at the manner he was treated with than at the failure of his petition, met the master of the house, who was struck with his mild melancholy look; and desiring to see the paper, at once perceived that it was the writing of a friend whom he had long known; and was so pleased with the poor man's artless account, that he sent him away with a light heart, and most liberal donation. In the course of a few days the Cottager had collected

rather more than thirty pounds, besides having received many presents of clothing. The benevolent society of Moravians, who resided near the village where the fire happened, not only subscribed in money, but their young people at the school busied themselves in making apparel for the old man. Autumn was now wearing away; the Cottager looked wistfully upon the spot where his little house had stood; if he could but build it up again, and there end his days, how happy should he be! He found his funds would not be equal to the expense, and he dreaded getting involved in debts that he might not be able to discharge; his delight, therefore, may be more easily imagined than described, when a benevolent nobleman and great landholder in the village, to whom the distressed never applied in vain, with the greatest kindness ordered timber, lime, and other materials, to be given to the poor man. This, after the handsome subscription he had already received, and presents of clothes and household things besides from the lady, was more than his most sanguine wishes could have expected: and never were prayers offered up to the Most High with greater ardour and sincerity, than those breathed by the grateful Cottager for blessings upon the head of his benefactor.

All now was bustle and activity; the ruins were soon cleared away, and the farmer, in whose father's service the old Cottager had worked so long, most liberally gave him carriage for all the materials for the building. Winter has now passed away, and the sun shines again upon the white walls of the cottage. The same order and neatness surround it: the rustic fence that bounded-in their little dwelling is all replaced; and this humble pair are again in possession of a comfortable house, in the spot where all their children had been born, and where they had passed themselves from youth to age. How was every thing endeared to them round this beloved

place, which some months ago they had hardly allowed themselves to hope they should ever again inhabit. Not even in the smiling days of youth did any spring appear to them so delightful as the present; nor in their eyes did the sloping primrose bank, that faced their cottage window, ever look so gay, or smell so sweet before.

They mourn not that their spring of life will not, like the leaves and flowers, be renewed. *Here* religion gilds their declining years with her cheering consolations; they love the church into which they had been baptized, and show their respect and reverence for its rites, by being steady and constant in their attendance there on the sabbath; their faith is sincere and unaffected;

“ Not that which cheats the wavering, wandering mind,
For ever seeking what it ne’er can find;
But faith composed, and silent, and sincere,
Warming the heart, illumining the tear,
And cheering unfelt age from year to year.”

They learn from their Bible and their minister, that CHRIST died for the sins of the whole world; and therefore go on in their Christian path with a meek hope that through his merits, they shall, when this fleeting life is ended, dwell with him in mansions of eternal glory.



THE
COTTAGE ON THE HEATH.

IN my various rambles amidst the dwellings of the poor, I had often passed a desolate house standing upon a common of some extent ; and in answer to my enquiries respecting the inhabitants, an air of mystery always seemed to hang about their concerns. The miserable hovel they inhabited barely sheltered them from the weather ; and the long narrow slip of ground adjoining it was suffered to lie uncultivated, and rank weeds of all descriptions were the only produce. For this miserable abode the strangers (for so they were called, though they had been known to reside there some years) paid a small rent ; and, as they did not become troublesome to any one in the parish, they soon ceased to be objects of attention. I confess I felt an unusual anxiety to know what could be the motive for such close concealment in their wretched dwelling ; and determined, if it were possible, to discover the cause.

It was a beautiful spring morning, when I prepared for my walk of enquiry ; the air was soft, but cheering ; all nature seemed to be rejoicing in the sunshine. My walk to this forlorn dwelling was beautifully diversified by hill and dale ; clusters of primroses covered the sunny banks, and the birds were carolling, whilst the distant note of the cuckoo brought a hundred pleasing associations to my mind : it told me, that winter, with all its storms and its cares, had

again passed away; again I beheld the opening buds; and the first beautiful and tender green appeared in the hedges; whilst the air was perfumed with violets that covered the banks. As I walked along, my heart was naturally lifted from "nature up to nature's God." How wonderful are thy works, oh, Lord! in wisdom hast thou made them all! These fair scenes thou hast given for the use of thy creatures; but with what coldness and indifference are thy great and glorious gifts received! How many look upon the revolving seasons without amusement, instruction, or delight: and yet the smallest of God's works, if attentively observed, will teach us the purest lessons of morality. A mind turned to the contemplation of the works of nature will never want amusement, but will find "books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in every thing." With these reflections passing in my mind as I walked slowly along, I soon found myself in view of the desolate mansion: even the long and dreary common on which it stood, lighted up now by the morning sun, looked gay and cheerful, with its tufts of yellow broom sprinkled over it.

When I came nearly opposite the cottage, and not till then, I began to consider in what way I should introduce myself to its poor inmates. I had heard that they were cold and suspicious in their manner whenever accosted; and at the approach of footsteps always closed their door to avoid observation. With these obstacles before me, I stood for some moments considering in what manner I should proceed, when I observed the cottage door slowly opened; and an elderly female, leading a child, came out; she stood quite still, with her head turned in an opposite direction to where I was, apparently watching for the approach of some one, with great earnestness. In the mean time the little girl bounded towards the wicket, and ran out upon the common, appearing delighted at having got away from her aged nurse

who stood in the same spot, unconscious of the flight of her young companion.

"Where are you going so fast, my little dear?" said I, advancing towards her; she suddenly stopped, and looking up in my face, I was struck with her infantine beauty. She appeared to be about six years old; her hair was light, and curling over her head; and from under these thick locks peeped out eyes of the softest blue, shaded with eye-lashes so dark and long, that they gave a beautiful expression to the countenance, mantling with the glow of health. Her dress was of the poorest description, and seemed quite appropriate to the desolate hovel from which she issued. Upon my repeating my question, she told me she was watching for her father; "Granny said he would come this way, but I don't see him:" and she was bounding back, when I thought I would lead her to the cottage; and then I could make my observations upon the inhabitants without its appearing that any thing but chance had directed my steps towards them. I therefore tried to engage my little companion's attention, by asking questions as she walked by my side in her way back to the cottage.

"Does your father always live with you?" said I.

"Oh no; he only comes now and then. My name is Jane," said the little innocent, fixing her pretty eyes upon me, and taking hold of my offered hand; "I have no brothers nor sisters to play with; only grandfather and granny live with me. But father says he will take me away to a fine place when he comes next, and that I shall ride in a coach with him. I wish he was come; and so does granny; for grandfather does nothing but scold all day long."

I now had reached the house with my little charge, who ran before to open the wicket, and I entered the garden of weeds and advanced towards the cottage-door; that was closed, but I pulled the latch and entered, leading my young companion by the hand. I had taken the inhabitants by surprise; they started

back at seeing a stranger, and a savage-looking dog that was near the door eyed me with suspicion; growled, and apparently only waited for the word of command to chastise me for my intrusion. I advanced timidly, with the little girl close by my side, and said I had met her on the common, some way from the house, and had taken charge of her back. Whilst I was speaking, I had time to make some observations on the inmates of this wretched abode. The old man was sitting in a low broken chair, blowing a few embers of fire; when he looked up, at my entrance, an expression of surprise, not unmingled with fear, spread itself over his weather-beaten countenance, upon which strong marks of care were depicted; his eyes were dark, and had a restlessness in their motion which showed that the mind was ill at ease; his beard seemed to be the growth of many days; and when he stood up, his tall lank figure, perfectly erect, gave one the idea of great muscular strength, though his furrowed cheek and wrinkled brow bespoke his being near seventy. His wife, as I supposed her to be, when I entered, was washing down the only table they had, and that of the rudest kind. She was tidily dressed, her countenance very pale, and her eyes looked red with weeping. She appeared many years younger than the old man, and advanced civilly towards me, thanked me for the care of my child, and then asked me if I would not sit and rest, at the same time placing a seat for me. The old man had resumed his employment of blowing the embers, evidently very anxious for my departure, by the frequent angry looks he gave his wife as she continued to press my stay. I was, therefore, compelled to leave the cottage without having been able to gratify my curiosity; but I concluded there must be some more than common cause for the reserve and suspicion of the old man. The child had interested me much; I longed to remove her from this desolate dwelling and place her at my village school, that she might

have the advantage of useful instruction ; and I was inclined to have made the proposal before I left the cottage, had not the angry and restless looks of the old man made me hesitate. As I pondered upon these things in my walk home, I determined, at some future day, to pay a second visit to the cottage, make the proposal respecting the child, and if the wretchedness that appeared to involve the old people was of such a nature as would come within the small limits of my power to soften or relieve, it would be my wish and duty to exert it in their favour. Unforeseen circumstances prevented my resuming my walk for some weeks. Summer was now in its "highest noon," and it was one of those lovely seasons so seldom met with in this uncertain climate, sunshine without a cloud ; and so great was the heat, that langour naturally crept over the frame when any exertions brought us in contact with its beams ; a walk, therefore, of three miles, was rather a formidable undertaking, and from day to day was put off. At last, however, a beautiful summer's evening, and a young companion, full of delight at the thoughts of a walk to a cottage she had heard so much of, determined me to set out. We had got within half a mile of the common, and were walking leisurely through a beautiful field which led to it ; nothing could be more calm and lovely than the scene around us, and "sweet the coming on of grateful evening mild ;" the air was laden with the perfume of flowers : we were roused from our contemplation of the beauties around us by a number of quick and hurried steps, which proceeded along the high road which we had to cross from the field, and which we had now almost gained. The buzzing of different voices made us stop at the stile to observe what could cause this clamour, when I perceived the old man, to whose home our steps were directed, in close custody, followed by several men and women, and a number of children. "What is his offence ?" said I, to one of the people that was

passing. "Oh! he is *tackled* at last," said the countryman, "for sheep-stealing, and other bad tricks; I thought all the noises that were heard upon the common at night times, candles burning at all hours, and the old fellow prowling about with that fierce lank dog at his side could not be for good; so now the old surly one is taken at last, and I hope will meet with his *deserts*." With these words he moved on after the culprit, who walked steadily, without seeming to regard the clamour and noise that surrounded him. We quickened our steps, and soon arrived at the cottage. We found the door partly open; the old woman was sitting in a kind of terrified stupor; near her stood the child, her laughing eyes dimmed with tears, tenderly looking up in her grandmother's face, trying to rouse her from her apathy, which seemed to affect the child in an indescribable degree. Still the poor woman spoke not, but sighed bitterly. The house was in great disorder, as if a violent struggle had been made to seize her husband; the table was overturned, and broken tea-cups were strewn upon the ground; the house was also full of smoke, apparently from things being thrust into the fire in the moment of hurry, in the hopes of avoiding detection; in short, nothing could be more forlorn and desolate than the appearance of the cottage, upon which the setting sun, as if in mockery, was throwing its last beams. My endeavours to rouse the poor woman, at first, were unsuccessful; till at last her recollection seemed slowly to return. She looked steadily at me, and then burst into a flood of tears. I did not endeavour to interrupt their course, as I knew the relief they must give to her aching heart. When she was a little more composed, I ventured to ask the cause of her husband's being sent to prison; and learnt that it was for sheep-stealing. As she gave me detached details of their eventful lives, it struck me that a little narrative of those events might prove useful, if they were printed and given to the

humbler classes of society. I have accordingly performed that task. The poor sufferer who gave me the particulars of the tale that follows, is now released from all her cares, and lies buried in the beautiful churchyard of the village she had inhabited. Before her death she had the consolation of knowing that her little innocent companion in suffering, had been taken by a benevolent lady, who promised to protect and provide for her.

Andrew Martin was the son of respectable parents, who inhabited a little freehold cottage which had been in the family nearly a century, it had two pleasant fields attached to it, and that, with the advantages of other land which they rented, enabled them to carry on a little farming business, enough for employment, and provide comfortably for the wants of their family, which consisted of three daughters and one son. Little Andrew was the darling of his mother, who was left a widow when he was hardly a twelvemonth old, and her injudicious partiality laid the foundation of his future misery. His temper was soured by incessant indulgence, he was the little tyrant of the house, and at a very early age did as he liked. His tears and passionate exclamations always prevailed upon his mother to comply with his wishes; little was this mistaken parent aware of the deep and lasting misery she was entailing upon the object of her affections, the time for sowing the good seed was neglected; can we wonder that the tares sprung up when there was no hand to check their growth. Andrew Martin was sent to a respectable day-school; but though the novelty at first pleased him, he soon grew tired of the restraint: and frequently when his mother supposed him to be there, was the little *vagrant* strolling about the fields with some idle companion that he had enticed to follow his example; and in roaming from place to place, in breaking hedges and climbing trees, was the day consumed; and when evening approached,

they slowly bent their steps homewards with a determination to renew their pastimes whenever they could do it without fear of detection. With these habits we cannot wonder that Andrew Martin made no progress in his learning, and when he left the school at fourteen he read very badly, his writing was scarcely legible, and as to accounts he knew very little about them. His aid was now required in the fields, the incessant entreaties of the fond mother that he would attend to the business, seemed to have very little weight with this headstrong boy; he worked or he did not as the fancy took him. His mother too late repented of her misplaced indulgence, and now endeavoured to make up for it by stern and harassing methods to keep him employed. Time wore on, and Martin, by the death of his mother, and the dispersion of his sisters, became, at the age of twenty-two, the sole possessor of the cottage and fields. He continued in the same course of idleness, and soon got into arrears; whilst the fields that used to be so well managed in his father's lifetime, soon showed that they had changed their possessor; broken hedges, weeds choking up his turnips and potatoes, and the corn land that was rented yielding so little produce for want of manure and labour, that the rent would more than swallow up the profits. Then in the cottage all was desolation, an old woman occasionally came to prepare his hurried meals. His chief home, however, was the neighbouring alehouse; where he sat and endeavoured to drive away care by drinking: and here he first became intimate with a desperate gang of poachers who had long been the terror of the neighbourhood; but so cautious were they in their depredations that hitherto they had escaped detection, though it was well known they lived only by plunder. Most evenings found them seated at the sign of the Swan, and Martin was soon attracted by their fearless manner and their declaration of detestation to labour; and then their arguments

were quite convincing to him "that there was no harm in snaring a bit of a bird or so, which *ought* to be the property of every one." These arguments, and the roving unsettled lives they led, had such charms for Martin that he soon linked himself to the fearless adventurers. One thing only made him pause, and this was the affectionate respect that, in spite of all the bad company he kept, who made the church and the parson a constant subject of ridicule — he continued to feel for the pastor of the village. This worthy man had often visited his mother during her long illness: his mild and persuasive voice, when lifted in supplication to Heaven for others, had struck even Martin with awe and respect; and when he observed the ease and happiness which his mother experienced when the good man knelt in prayer by her bed-side, his thoughts were, for the passing moment, turned towards that invisible world to which we are all hastening. But these intervals of reflection had no root, and the impression soon died away. True it was that Martin sometimes attended the church, and always appeared attentive to the plain and edifying discourses he heard there; but then the thoughts of to-morrow banished all serious reflections; he was in the prime of manhood; death seemed at an immeasurable distance; why, therefore, "ponder upon things that only concerned the sick and the aged;" and yet, in spite of this vain reasoning, the thought would sometimes, in the midst of his wild career, steal across him of the calm content those experienced that walked steadily on in the course of virtue. One family he knew and loved, where he saw exemplified the power that religion has upon well regulated minds, even in the midst of the direst distress. John Hawkins, his wife and daughter, had known better days, sickness and unavoidable misfortunes had brought them low in the world, but they were contented and cheerful

even in the midst of their deprivation, and when you walked to the cottage in an evening you would generally see the old couple sitting in their honeysuckle porch till the light of the sun had faded away, and they then shut the door and listened to the soft voice of their young and fair daughter, as she read to them from that sacred volume from which they had derived that comfort which no man could take from them. What sight can be more beautiful than that of a dutiful child ministering to the wants of her aged parents? and this duty Fanny performed in the most exemplary manner. She was truly the prop of their declining years. Sunday was almost the only day that found her from home, and then her arm supported the aged pair to church. The effort on their parts was great to get there; but when they did accomplish it, the consolation and happiness they derived from hearing our beautiful church service, and the impressive discourse that followed amply rewarded them for their laborious walk. It was pleasant, and indeed edifying, to see these virtuous people, with their calm and resigned looks, kneeling in the house of God, all earthly cares apparently shut out from their thoughts, which were lifted up with fervent piety to the great Maker of all things, and many a pious prayer was then breathed for their poor Fanny, who at their death would be left an orphan and thrown desolate upon a hard world. They might well be proud of Fanny, she was all that the fondest parent could wish, gentle, kind, with a disposition of so much sweetness that she was always ready to assist her neighbours in numberless little kind offices which the poorest have in their power. When there was sickness Fanny was the most affectionate and attentive nurse, always ready to give what little time she had to spare to the service of others. She had also great personal attractions, which were set off by her plain and unaffected dress.

She was a poor man's daughter, fine clothes did not become her station in life; but she was always remarked for the extreme neatness of her apparel; her glossy brown hair curled naturally over her fair forehead, and then her cap was of snowy whiteness, and a straw bonnet, of her own making, with a simple riband to confine it, and that with a linen gown and dark shawl was the extent of Fanny's finery. How much better would it be if her example was followed by other poor girls, who spend the little money they have at command in ornaments unbecoming their station!

Fanny, though she had known happier days, felt *now* that her money would be much better applied to purchase useful clothing than laid out upon finery. She little knew how much she was respected for this conduct; all strangers that came to church remarked her simple and neat appearance, which formed a striking contrast to the flaunting girls around her. Andrew Martin often thought if he could get such a wife as Fanny he should then like his home; but Fanny, he fancied, did not think of him, his unsettled and rambling life was well known to her and her parents: and though Andrew often came and sat with them, and they as often remonstrated with him upon his careless and indolent habits, it did not once cross their minds that he liked Fanny or Fanny him. Young people, thrown together so frequently as they were, naturally began to entertain an affection for each other; true it was that Fanny hardly allowed herself to think of him in the light of a lover, but she wished he was settled and happy in his cottage, he was so kind to her father, assisted her mother in a thousand little ways, then he often brought her flowers, and would sit and listen to the chapter she daily read to her parents; surely all that was said of him was not true; once, and only once, she had seen him in boisterous spirits, caused by a visit with his wild friends to the alehouse; he talked incoherently, looked flushed, and, in short,

exhibited all the disgusting symptoms which attend upon those who are addicted to strong liquors. Poor Fanny ! one of the reports she had heard to his disadvantage was now confirmed : and though she felt and knew that men with the most sober habits will sometimes, in the company of friends, exceed the bounds of moderation ; yet, in this instance, it seemed more like a settled habit, as when Martin called at her father's it was only the middle of the day, when all industrious people were at their labours. Andrew must therefore have been spending his money and time at the alehouse ; she turned from him with disgust, and saw him reel out of the door and bend his steps, not homewards, but probably to the same scene of riot from which he had only just staggered.

Martin was the subject of much conversation that evening at the cottage : the old man spoke of his habits of idleness as being confirmed ; he had that day been at his house, and saw all the neglect that was caused by them ; his fields were almost uncultivated ; here and there some sickly corn was growing, but so choked with weeds that the produce would hardly pay for the labour of reaping it ; then the cottage was going fast to decay, tiles blown off and not replaced, so that the rain penetrated in many places, and the timber being exposed to the wet was in a rotten state. The old man sighed when he mentioned these things : Martin had been known to him from a child, and frequently had he spoken to his mother of the folly of indulging all his wayward habits ; and he always thought that if his disposition had not been pampered with over indulgence he would have turned out a different character ; now occasional idleness was settled into confirmed habits, while ruin seemed to be fast advancing upon him. One effort more the old man determined to make, to try if he could snatch him from the precipice upon the brink of which he was standing, and accordingly

he had sought him in his own house and his fields, but there he was not; at last he met him with two or three dissolute characters, in whose company he was generally to be found. Martin would have avoided the old man if he could, but that was impossible as their road lay the same way; he therefore let his companions go on, and joined the old man who told him he had been seeking him at his own house.

"There, indeed, you are wanted enough," said he; "summer is advancing and you have no appearance of any crops. Oh! Martin, Martin, why will you not be persuaded to leave off these bad habits; and instead of loitering away hour after hour with such characters as those just before us, get up with the lark, dig in your fields, and let not what Solomon says of the sluggard be so suited to yourself. These men with whom you associate you know live by plunder; they have already been engaged in two desperate battles with the keepers, and poor Samuel Willoughby will carry to his grave the marks of their vengeance. Besides, it is thought they were concerned in stealing some sheep from the common about half a year ago; and though nothing could be brought home sufficient to commit them to prison, yet there was great ground for supposing they knew more of the matter than they could have done had they been innocent. However, Martin, there is a great God above who sees, and knows, all things; he "is about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways," and will bring all these things to light: but do, Martin," and the old man looked up affectionately in his face, "do consider before it is too late the miseries you are heaping upon your own head by such wild and unsettled conduct; the alehouse is more your home than that neat and pretty mansion which is now in sight. How well do I remember that good man your father, always busy in his fields, not a weed was there to be found; early and late he was employed; and when

evening came and he had finished his labours, how pleasant did his home appear to him, with its cheerful fire and comfortable meal ! and he died as he lived, respected and beloved by every one."

Martin heard all the old man said without any reply, but walked silently on till they reached the stile which led to his home, there he suddenly stopped, and looking earnestly at the old man, said in a hurried manner, " All will be well if you will consent to let me have Fanny for my wife ; I shall then stay at home quietly, and shall be happy ; and the fear of not marrying her has driven me to the alehouse, where I drink to get rid of care ; for I know Fanny will not have me if you and her mother are against it." Here he stopped, and the old man replied, " How can we consent, Martin, to give you our child, who is dearer to us than any thing in this life, unless we had better security for your actions than merely your own words ? Fanny has been to us a most dutiful and kind daughter ; but if you were to marry her, and continue your present bad habits, we should bring down misery upon our own heads, and upon her's also. Poor Fanny is worthy of many, many blessings ; for the Scripture tells us, that a dutiful child is the Lord's delight."

Martin made no reply, and left the old man, who walked leisurely home, pondering upon the conversation he had had with Martin. When he entered his cottage, Fanny was sitting at the door with her work, and rose up to put the old man his arm-chair !

" You look pale, father," said she, " and tired : where have you been so long ? See ! the sun is just setting ; how glorious it looks through the elm tree."

" Fanny," said the old man, " I have been detained upon your account ; my thoughts and talk have been of you, my child."

" Of me, father !" replied Fanny, and a blush stole across her cheeks, as she looked timidly up.

" Yes, Fanny : Martin has been telling me that he loves you ; and that if he could get you to become

his wife, he should forsake the alehouse, and get rid of all his idle practices ; but how, my child, can your mother and I consent to part with you, even provided you were willing to listen to Martin, unless we could be sure he would have resolution enough to give up his wild courses ? ”

Fanny’s heart beat violently. To be the wife of Martin had been her secret wish, though she durst hardly own it to herself. Martin had never directly spoken to her upon the subject ; but when he came to the cottage, which he did frequently, he always listened so patiently to her father’s angry remonstrances, he was so patient under them, that she felt convinced, if he had a comfortable home, that all his idle habits (and she knew not the extent of them) would be given up, and that she should be the happy means of reclaiming him. All these thoughts rushed across her mind when her father mentioned the proposal, and he soon discovered that Fanny had long cherished feelings of kindness and affection for Martin. Her mother was made acquainted with what had passed ; and it was at last agreed that Martin, when he came next to the cottage, should have the consent of all parties, provided he agreed to wait till summer was past, and in that interval of time, if he steadily minded his work, and forsook his idle haunts and vicious companions, the old people would then have some confidence in his promises. They, like Fanny, had a most affectionate regard for him, and had known him from his birth ; his frank good-natured manner, his alacrity to serve and assist them in a hundred little ways, were present to their minds ; and if he did reform, and they earnestly hoped he would, how happy should they be to see the two beings they loved best upon earth, united and living together in the same quiet home, instead of leaving their darling child at their death desolate and friendless, exposed to dangers which beset the path of the young and destitute. With these reflections, and knowing how

sincerely Fanny agreed with them, we cannot wonder; when Martin came the following day to the cottage, that all was soon arranged between them; but upon the sole condition that summer, and autumn, were to pass away as a time of trial; and the marriage not to take place till the close of the year. To an ardent and impatient temper this appeared a hard condition; but Fanny and her parents were firm in their refusal to hear of an earlier period, and Martin was obliged to yield to their wishes in this respect. He was, however, so happy in the prospect of that domestic comfort for which he had so long ardently wished, that he determined that the work of reform should begin immediately; and the night of the day that saw him at the cottage was spent by him at his own house, looking over the various work that his careless habits had brought upon him. However, he was now in earnest in his resolves; but bitter regret was mixed with his reflections, as he walked round his premises, and observed the decayed and ruinous state that every thing was in. The wonder was, that this had not struck him before. His first object was to get his house repaired and put in habitable order. The old woman who had the care of it was surprised at these sudden alterations, shook her head, and hoped such good resolves would last. For the first time for many months the sign of the Swan had not been visited. Martin was seen the next morning at early dawn busily employed in his fields; and after a day of great toil, he bent his steps towards the cottage, and was received with smiles of kindness, for his industry had been remarked by the old man; not without a fervent hope that this was the beginning of a reform that would bring joy and gladness along with it.

Time passed on, and Martin's home began to look smiling and gay in the valley; and though summer, with its sunshine and flowers were hastening by, winter was hailed by Martin with peculiar delight, as now he

was about to receive his reward. Ardent and impetuous in all his pursuits, as long as any motive was presented for his activity; but, alas! as the sequel will show, *his* was a character in which the good seed did take root, but for want of moisture it soon withered away! In the mean time the old people were vigilant observers of his conduct, and saw with pleasure that his old haunts were abandoned; his countenance bore the marks of exercise and sobriety. Fanny was the prize he so eagerly sought, and at last obtained. A cold sunless morning in December found him at the cottage, where a few of the bride's friends were invited to attend her to church. Fanny was dressed in the same simple manner that had always become her so well, — the only difference was, that her bonnet was of a finer texture, and her gown of a snowy whiteness. The old people were too infirm to venture to church, which was at a considerable distance; but it was arranged that the young pair should return to the cottage, and receive the blessing of their parents after they became man and wife. Poor Fanny! her heart was full when she looked at her father and mother, and thought she was about to leave the home of her childhood. The wintry wind blew sullen blasts around; and her tears, in spite of her endeavours to smile them away, would come unbidden to her eyes. Alas! they were a melancholy presage of the storms of life that she was about to encounter. At last the bridal party set off, the old people watching them from the door of the cottage as long as they continued in sight, and fervent were the prayers offered up to the Most High for the happiness of their child. The ways of Providence are unsearchable, past finding out; and nothing so certainly shows that this life is meant for one of trial and preparation for a better, than the afflictions we see visiting those whose conduct has been mixed with as few faults as erring human nature can be supposed to have; and we short-sighted mortals are apt to murmur when we behold others; with

half the pretensions of those we love, having their cup of enjoyment full and overflowing, though their lives are marked with faults and vices of which the afflicted are clear. "Then thought I to understand these things, but it was too hard for me till I entered into the courts of the Lord: then I understood how thou didst set them in slippery places. Oh! how suddenly do they perish and come to a fearful end!"—*Psalms*.

The clergyman who performed the nuptial ceremony, and who had always shown a high sense of the dutiful conduct of Fanny to her parents, when it was concluded presented her with a Bible and Prayer Book, enclosed in a morocco case, and small enough to be brought with her to church. The gift was accompanied with his earnest wishes for her future welfare.

Let us now follow the bride and bridegroom back to the cottage of her father. Fanny passed the day in dutiful attentions to them, and in instructions to a young girl, an orphan and a distant relation, who was to supply her place in administering to the wants which increasing years demand; and though Fanny hoped often to come to the cottage, which was only two miles from her future home; yet when evening advanced, and she was repeatedly reminded by Martin that it was time for them to depart, one look more was to be given to the home of her infancy, its neat little parlour with polished table, and a clear fire burning brightly, the old people striving to be cheerful; can we wonder that Fanny lingered on the threshold, and took another and another look at scenes and objects so beloved?

For the first three or four months after Martin's marriage nothing could apparently go on better or happier; he attended to his farm, and Fanny who made his home so neat and comfortable, was constantly employed; and when he came in fatigued with his day's work, he was always met with smiles, the little table

was spread, and his evening repast prepared and set before him, with all the attention to his wishes that a kind and tender female is ever ready to show. In this calm and happy manner time glided on, the old people, by slow decay, sunk gradually into the arms of death, within a few days of each other. Full of resignation and pious hope, they had now no more anxious wishes for their daughter; she was the happy wife of Martin; the last object that their eyes rested upon in this world; and when she knelt by the bedside of her dying parents, and received with them the Sacrament, administered by the kind vicar with that holy devotion which the solemnity of the rite inspired, her beautiful and expressive countenance would have formed a fine subject for the skill of the painter. During the illness of Fanny's parents, she was naturally much occupied in nursing them, and for the last ten days of their lives she did not leave them. During this interval Martin renewed his acquaintance with his former vicious friends; they laughed at his scruples at not meeting them at the Swan, and spending a social evening with them; talked of the folly of men being ruled by their wives, and not having a will of their own. Piqued by these taunts, he was determined to prove the contrary, and promised to take a pipe and a pint with them that very evening: he would call at the cottage to see his wife, and hear how the old people were going on, and then, as he must pass the Swan in his way to his own home, he assured them he would prove that his wife had no control over his inclinations. He kept his word, and was received with no little exultation by the party at the Swan; the sober pint was soon doubled and trebled, and Martin, for the first time since his marriage, went reeling home. Luckily Fanny was with her parents, and she had not then the misery of knowing that the intimacy with these idle and vicious characters was again renewed.

When Martin awoke the next morning, his conscience smote him at having broken through all the good resolutions he had formed; and when he paid his daily visit at the cottage of his dying parents he was thoughtful and disturbed, and poor Fanny fancied it was the melancholy sight of approaching death that caused this alteration in him. Martin was standing by the bedside — the old man made an effort to raise himself; and taking Martin by the hand, he told him he died happy and contented, since he had lived to see him reclaimed from his bad habits; he earnestly besought him never to renew his intimacy with people who had been so nearly the cause of his ruin; and blessing him and Fanny, who stood dissolved in tears, he ceased to speak; and in a few moments, with that holy prayer of our Lord trembling upon his lips, the hand of death gently relieved him from all his worldly sufferings; — in two days more Fanny was bereaved of her remaining parent, and they were both consigned to their earthly bed on the same day. They had been married in the morning of their days, and had struggled together through a long life; had met with many sorrows, but they were those sorrows that came from God, and therefore they submitted to all the deprivations it was his good Providence to allot them. The power and efficacy of religion was never more fully exemplified than in the conduct of this humble pair. In all their sorrows the Bible was their constant source of consolation, and they followed the precepts it taught; it consoled and cheered them when, in the beautiful language of that holy book, they were arrived at that period when “they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of

music shall be brought low." "Their lives were lovely, and in their deaths they were not divided."

Fanny was now again returned to her husband's house, and was looking forward to the time, which was fast approaching, when she should become a mother. One evening as she was busily employed at her needle, she saw Martin returning home, and with him two of the men with whom he had so solemnly promised her parents, now in their grave, never to associate. As they advanced towards the house, she observed them suddenly turn off, and Martin came into the cottage alone; he threw himself down into a chair, and did not speak, but looked sullen and discontented.

"I am tired of this continual work," said Martin, turning abruptly round to his wife, "and think I shall give up the farm, and the money I shall get for the stock will be enough to keep us, and I can get some light employment that will suit better than this toiling from morning till night; and I hardly ever get good crops."

"Oh! Martin," said Fanny, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke, "where will you be so well off as in this our pretty home? Depend upon it there is no happiness in idleness; but those men, those wicked men, have put these notions in your head, and the promises you made to my dear parents are — are — all forgotten."

Poor Fanny sobbed aloud; and Martin, feeling the truth of what she said, was irritated, and in an angry manner snatched up his hat and left the house.

Fanny remained in the same place weeping; the hours wore away, and Martin returned not. She bitterly upbraided herself for having spoken upon the subject which so suddenly caused his departure. He would not surely remain out much longer: still he came not; and the shades of night were fast approaching; and the rain pattered against the window.

Fanny's little preparation for supper was discontinued; she walked about the house with breathless impatience, blaming herself for having said a word to cause his departure. As the wind mournfully sounded, and the storm kept increasing, her fears rose with it. She ventured, however, in spite of the weather, to light her lantern, and creep to the end of the little path that led to the village. Still no welcome sound of Martin's approach met her ears; and she returned heartless and disconsolate to her home, where she sat by the dying embers, hoping and anxiously waiting his return.

The girl who lived with her in the capacity of servant was a mere child, and was gone to bed long before Fanny ventured out in the storm; and with that kindness and gentleness of disposition which characterised her, she would not call her from her quiet sleep, though the solitude and the silence was almost insupportable. Rain now came down in torrents; the wind shook the cottage casements. Where was Martin at this moment?—seated by a large fire at the Swan, with pipes and liquor, and laughing companions by his side; fancying himself much injured and insulted by poor Fanny's meek remonstrances, and steeling his heart by copious draughts against her sufferings, which he knew would be acute at his absence. Midnight came, and the storm ceased; and Martin went reeling home. His welcome step was heard by the poor listener. As she bounded towards the door to receive him, "Oh, Martin! why have you left me in anger?" she said timidly; but perceiving his tottering step, and flushed face, she ceased speaking, but quietly assisted him to bed, where a heavy sleep soon shut out all his cares. The next morning, when recollection returned, he felt ashamed of his conduct; and endeavoured to atone for it by keeping steadily to his work, and spending his evenings quietly at home.

No reproaches passed Fanny's lips; she never alluded to his unkindness or her own sufferings.

In a short time afterwards she was the happy mother of a fine boy; and as she pressed it to her bosom, a silent prayer was offered up that its father's erring habits would cease; and that the birth of this child might prove a comfort to them both. Happiness in this world, however, was not to be the lot of Fanny. Her child lived but a short time; Martin got into debt; and with increasing difficulties, brought on by his own irregular habits and vicious companions, he became morose and hardened. All his property, by degrees, dwindled away; and at last poor Fanny found herself friendless, houseless, and alone in the wide world, Martin having fled no one knew where. But his companions had also disappeared; so that it was probable that they were together upon some lawless pursuit or other. In the mean time the house and the little remaining property fell into the hands of the creditors. Fanny was received by a kind neighbour into her cottage: but she was poor, and could only afford her a temporary habitation. What was to be done? She shrunk from the thoughts of parish relief; and yet without it how could she support herself? her health was giving way rapidly from the intense anxiety of her mind, which precluded sleep.

As she was sitting one morning, pale and breathless, at the cottage door, revolving in her mind all the miseries that had crowded into her short life, her tears fell fast as she thought of her husband. Though so unworthy of her affection, the idea that she should see him no more, convulsed her frame almost to agony. She at last roused herself from these painful reflections; and upon her bended knees prayed to God to support and sustain her. Her case had gained the commiseration of some of her opulent neighbours: a little subscription was made, and

a comfortable apartment provided for her, without the aid of the parish, which her independent spirit so much dreaded to seek. Her life was now drawing to a close. Her frame, by nature not a strong one, sunk under all these harassing events; and consumption, in its most rapid form, soon convinced her friends that a very few weeks would end all her earthly miseries. Nothing could be more calm, more resigned, or more unaffectedly pious, than the last moments of this interesting young woman. Her good friend, the village Pastor, attended her daily; and read those portions of Scripture more immediately adapted to her present situation. One earthly gratification she longed ardently for; and that was, to see her husband: but of that there appeared little chance. No tidings from any quarter had been heard of him; her end was fast approaching: she was become too weak to leave her bed. A few hours before her death she delivered into the hands of the kind Pastor, who was praying by her, the Bible and Prayer Book he had given her at her marriage; with an earnest wish, that, if Martin should ever return, they might be given to him as her dying gift. In the blank leaf under her name was written this passage from Scripture: "Return unto the Lord thy God, and he will have mercy upon thee, and abundantly pardon." The writing this was a great effort for poor Fanny. And after she had completed the task, earthly thoughts seemed to have left her; they were raised to heaven; all was tranquillity and peace. Her slumbers, though short and broken, brought in dreams before her eyes her father and mother, who appeared to be waiting to conduct her to the heavenly mansions. And her last sigh, which set her free from a world of care and sorrow, was so gentle, that the people around her bed could scarcely believe she had ceased to exist. Poor Fanny! she lies buried in her native village, by the side of her parents. Her short career was marked by many sorrows: but her early habits of

piety taught her to support them without murmuring; and submit with pious resignation to the ways of Providence, unsearchable and past finding out!

Nothing certain of Martin's fate was heard for some years after the death of his wife. One of his companions had fallen in a fierce encounter with a game-keeper in a neighbouring county. He had confessed upon his dying bed many and dark crimes. And in some of them there was reason to suppose Martin had participated.

Time passed on; and in the old man, in the desolate cottage upon the heath, we behold the husband of poor Fanny! Age, with all its cares and perplexities, now surrounded him. He had lived by rapine and plunder. The woman who gave me these particulars had been his companion for many years. He had repeatedly promised her marriage; but the promise was never fulfilled. By her he had one son, who grew up amidst all the bad examples with which he was constantly surrounded, a daring fearless character; from his early childhood initiated into scenes of riot and plunder. No Sabbath chime ever called him to church! or made him pause a moment to reflect upon the consequences that would attend upon detection, on he went, despising danger, and escaping, almost by miracle, the hands of justice. Sometimes he would arrive at his father's desolate abode in the dead of night, carrying the carcass of a sheep which he had just slaughtered; or he would bring game, which the snare or the net had given him: in short, this desolate dwelling was made the depôt of all the stolen goods. But here he tarried not; nor was he ever known to any of the inhabitants of the neighbouring village; so dark, so cautious, and so wary was he in all his movements. His father often accompanied him when any depredation took place near home: and many were the escapes they had hitherto had. However, the career of vice was now to be checked. The frequent losses that had

taken place within a few months led to more than usual vigilance: and one night, when sheep was again the object of plunder, and the old man had succeeded in securing two without any struggle, one he and his son had just slaughtered, when the sharp low growl of their dog gave notice that some one was at hand. The night was too dark to distinguish objects. They remained in breathless silence for some moments; all was still; and nothing but the sighing of the wind could be heard. They moved cautiously along, carrying the dead sheep; and deposited it in the small out-house belonging to the cottage. In the mean time the watchers had acted with the greatest caution, and were soon confirmed in their suspicions. They kept at a great distance, though once the dog had nearly discovered them. It having been argued that the most certain way was to take them by surprise in the cottage; and accordingly thither they bent their steps. Morning had now dawned; and the two men who were upon the watch had seated themselves in a situation that commanded a full view of the cottage; at the same time some low bushes screened them from observation. At last they saw the old man open the cottage door; this was a signal for them to act: and in a few moments they made their entry. A desperate struggle ensued. Martin was overpowered, the son not being there to defend him. He had, as usual, when he had deposited the stolen goods, made no stay, but proceeded immediately into a neighbouring wood, which lay at no great distance from the common. His person was not known at all in the neighbourhood. No one was aware who had been so long a time so powerful an assistant to Martin in his hours of plunder: he had been long suspected; but no proofs had hitherto been able to be brought home to him.

The wretched father, consigned to a prison, with almost a certain prospect of an ignominious death, now, indeed, began to feel all the bitterness of his

situation. Conscience, which had slept so long, now brought in array all his past faults: his thoughts naturally went back to those early scenes of life, when, by a steady conduct, he might have done so well. Fanny also, the kind, the affectionate wife, he had brought by his cruelty to an early grave. Her dying gift, which had many years ago reached him, with an account of her death, had for a short time the effect of making him feel bitterly. But he was then a vagabond upon the earth; and too deeply initiated into the ways of sin to have sufficient resolution to break through habits so firmly established. Now, however, in the solitude of a prison, death, and judgment, and an invisible world, filled him with agony not to be described. What would he at that moment have given for a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man?

In the evening of the next day he was permitted to see the woman who had passed for his wife; and from her he learnt that his son returned to the cottage at midnight, and upon hearing what had happened, told his mother he should come back no more. This intelligence was some relief to the wretched man; as for the present he was secure from suffering on account of the offence for which Martin was imprisoned. In the mean time the old man was very anxious to see the Chaplain of the prison, who was a mild, unaffected Christian, much esteemed and respected; and it was a singular fact, he turned out to be a nephew to the Pastor that Martin, in his early days, so much respected. To him Martin made a full disclosure of all the events of his troubled life, only concealing the share that his son had taken in the last transaction.

His trial would not take place for some considerable time; the Chaplain was unremitting in his attention to the wretched prisoner, and had brought his mind to a more composed state. Every day he read to him portions of the Bible, and pointed out to him, for his own perusal, those chapters that im-

mediately applied to his sad state. In the many conversations he held with the kind-hearted Chaplain, Martin freely owned, that for the last ten years of his life he had scarcely known a moment's ease; always in dread of detection; sometimes exposed to the extreme of want: and as he could not, with all his endeavours, stifle the pangs of conscience even in his dreams, all the events of his erring life would crowd upon him, — his wife, his early home, days of comfortable innocence and peace; he would wake and find the miserable reality of being a vagabond upon the earth, stained with offences and crimes. Still he hurried on in the same dangerous course, though from that course nothing but sorrow and disappointment were the result.

Martin's cup of affliction was not yet full. A short time before the assizes commenced, his kind friend, the Chaplain, came to apprise him in as gentle a manner as possible, that his son was a prisoner under the same roof as himself. He had been taken up for a burglary in the neighbourhood; and was soon known by the officers of justice as an old offender, who had hitherto escaped, almost by miracle, falling into their hands. Now, then, Martin's hopes for his son were over. The Chaplain had promised to see him; and to bring word to the anxious father how he bore his sad fate.

The hours passed heavily along with the afflicted man; the Bible lay before him; and he endeavoured to still his throbbing heart by casting off all worldly thoughts, and applying to that holy book for consolation. And consolation stole upon him as he read; and pondered upon all the gracious promises held out by our blessed Saviour. If his life should be spared him, Martin felt strong in hope that the remnant of his days would be passed in repentance.

His thoughts were now turned to his son, who was in the prime of manhood. "And I," said Martin, with a heavy sigh, "have led him, by the force of

my own bad example, to the gallows. Oh, God ! oh, God ! hear the cry of his wretched father, and spare him, if not in this world, yet let him not die eternally." In the evening the Chaplain came, according to his promise, and told Martin he had seen his son, but he found him sullen and hardened, and after remaining with him a considerable time he came away without having been able to make the slightest impression upon this hardened man, though he mentioned how anxious his father was about him ; he sent no message of kindness, but said bitterly, though truly, "that to him he owed all his misfortunes."

The assizes were now at hand, at which both the father and son would take their trial, though for different offences ; in the mean time the Chaplain was indefatigable in his attentions to both prisoners. Martin was resigned and prepared for the worst ; not so his son, he rejected all religious consolation ; laughed at the Chaplain's vain endeavours to make him think seriously ; and though he entertained very little hopes that either his own or his father's life would be spared, swore with an oath that he would die *game*, and hoped the *old one* would not whine about him, as what was done could not be helped.

Martin was first brought to the bar, his case caused great commiseration. His grey hairs, tottering steps, and the long confinement that he had had, and its being generally known how well that time had been employed, caused a strong sensation in his favour ; and though sentence of death was recorded against him, it was made known to him by the judge that his life would be spared.

Martin's son was not put upon his trial till the next day ; his conduct was very different from that of his father ; his bold defiance of all around him, the careless laugh, the contempt and coolness he betrayed at the passing scene, though he had so deep an interest in its results ; nay, even when the jury were consulting, at that awful moment of suspense

and terror, so hardened was this unfortunate man, that he looked and talked as if he was an unconcerned spectator: however, at the moment when the foreman turned round, and the court was hushed to silence, and the word *Guilty* was audibly pronounced, a flash of crimson was seen upon the prisoner's face; but it soon subsided, and he heard his sentence of death from the judge without showing the slightest emotion.

Martin had passed the day in agony, and as the hours wore heavily along, he continued to pace his narrow cell, till, exhausted by fatigue, he sunk almost lifeless upon the ground. At that moment the unlocking of his prison door was heard; the gaoler entered, and with him the Chaplain. The wretched old man looked up, and could only articulate "My son! my son!" The tale was soon told, and Martin's worst fears were confirmed. His kind and reverend friend stayed with him till the first burst of agony was passed, and he became more calm and resigned, and in a state to hear particulars of the trial. The extremely hardened conduct of his son weighed heavily upon the old man's heart. His conscience told him that through his means he had been brought up in vice. Tears rolled down his aged cheeks whilst he listened to the sad detail, which was considerably softened by the kind relater. Martin was now anxious to be allowed to see his son, and permission for an interview with the condemned criminal was obtained for the next day. When they met, sullenness and indifference marked the conduct of the son—agony of the deepest and most touching kind that of the father; and when the parting moment arrived, the old man was almost by force torn from the cell: then, and not till then, a few tears dropped from the prisoner's eyes upon the hand of his father, which was fast locked in his. The Clergyman, who was present at the interview, took this opportunity of offering the consolations of religion; but the young man sternly

refused to listen to him, and wiping hastily away the traces of the tears that had fallen, relapsed into the same hardened and indifferent manner that had marked his conduct, both before and after his condemnation. The father saw his son no more: the shock of that interview upon his constitution was so powerful that the day before the execution of the young man, the keeper, upon going into the cell, found the wretched parent stretched upon his bed, speechless and unable to rise, but sensible. Medical aid was quickly resorted to, but without effect; paralysis had seized upon the exhausted and worn-out frame of the old man. The Chaplain knelt by the bed of death, and with solemn and devout feelings prayed to God to have mercy upon the sinner. The old man's lips quivered—he endeavoured to raise himself in his bed, and to repeat after the Chaplain the Lord's Prayer. This was the last effort of expiring nature; one more struggle, and all was over. On the following morning the son expiated his offences on the gallows. He refused to the last to partake in any religious rite, mounted the scaffold with a firm and undaunted step, and in a few moments his early but guilty course was closed for ever!

A few remarks and my tale is done: and first, we may learn from this sad story of what importance it is to set a good example to our children. Martin, in his morning of life, had no guide but his own passions; a kind but injudicious mother gave way to all his little failings—idleness and vicious companions completed his ruin. For a short time a virtuous connection had the power to stop him in his career of vice; but the good seed had no root, and soon withered away. When the son was born the father was living entirely by plunder; and though he shrunk from cruelty and bloodshed, we cannot wonder that his child, who had never known virtue, had no such scruples, but grew up a dauntless fiery spirit, and plunged with fearlessness into every danger; and when the declining years

of his father made him no longer a safe companion, he persuaded him to live upon the lonely moor, and the desolate cottage which we have described was the depôt of the various stolen goods that his son, in his hasty visits, brought there, and which at last led to their condemnation. What would the old man have given to have recalled the days that were gone? How often, in his solitary prison, did he think upon his native village, upon his young buried wife whom he had once so fondly loved, his neat and happy home—all those comforts exchanged for a life of crime, of turbulence and sorrow! He also felt that the ruin of his son was owing to him. Perhaps if he had the advantages that Martin once possessed, he would now have been a prop to his father's declining days—an ornament instead of a disgrace to society. Let us humbly hope that God will pardon and forgive their offences, and at last receive them to his mercy.

SOME ACCOUNT
OF THE
UTILITY, AS PRACTICALLY EXEMPLIFIED,
OF
SMALL CLUBS
IN
COUNTRY VILLAGES.



SOME ACCOUNT, &c.

THE great increase of pauperism of late years, and the almost total abandonment of those independent feelings, which are now become so rare amongst the the labouring classes, has been long universally acknowledged.

Twenty years ago, frequently in my rambles among the cottages of the poor, the sight of the labourer, surrounded by a numerous family, whom he worked hard, no doubt, to maintain, *but did maintain*, without assistance from the parish, was then an event of no rare occurrence: in many instances I have known the struggle to be excessive; but the idea was *so degrading* of having his name held up amongst the parish paupers, as nearly to sink under his own exertions to prevent the necessity of such a humiliation. But where now shall we look for the labourer who feels or cares for these things? So much is the scene reversed, and so *entirely* departed are those feelings of independence, that the struggle now is to get from the parish, if not by fair means, at least by the help of exaggerated circumstances, by concealment in some cases, collusion in others, no matter to him by what means, so as he can but gain the relief prayed for: and the money in every instance obtained in this way goes, not to the necessities of his wife and infant family, (the ill health of

the former, perhaps, being the plea he brings for asking parochial aid,) but is frequently spent at the alehouse. An instance of the kind occurred in this parish some time ago. A man appeared at the pay-board, stating that his wife was so ill, that he was under the necessity of asking relief, the state of the poor woman being well known to be what he described. Some money was immediately granted him; but instead of hastening home and procuring for her those little comforts which what he had received would have afforded her, he very deliberately walked into an alehouse, and did not leave it till he had expended most of the money, and then in a state of intoxication reeled home; and by this cruel and wanton excess, at such a moment, added deeply to the distresses of his infant family and suffering wife.

One of the great causes of the increase of pauperism, no doubt, may be traced to the early marriages that are now so frequently contracted. Here again the independent feeling of the poor earning their own maintenance is lost, and they look to the parish for that relief which their necessities will soon require; for having *determined* to marry, they have not even the prudence to wait till they have procured, by their own industry, something to enable them to purchase a few necessary articles for their cottage; they can but come to the parish they say, and with this consoling idea they marry, have a large family, and thus pauperism daily increases, and no exertion is made by them to avoid this worst kind of servitude. Great distress is also very apt to shake the moral principle; and the little hucksters' shops, which are to be found in most villages, and which retail articles in the dearest manner, prove also a snare to the wavering honesty of the pauper; he finds he can get trusted for tea, sugar, &c. and goes on by little and little till those articles amount to a sum he never dreamt of. In despair at being told the money must

be procured, or that nothing more will be furnished to him, he with the pittance he has received for his daily labour, which enables him *at first* to pay for the few necessities he requires, gets credit at another huckster's shop, till a similar event occurs; and so by insensible degrees he is soon reduced to the most abject poverty, and frequently in despair sets out upon some nefarious pursuit, leaving his wife and family to be entirely supported by the parish, whilst he follows a career of vice which generally ends in transportation, or the forfeit of his life to the offended laws of his country. No doubt the present state of the Poor Laws almost inevitably leads to these miseries, in many cases at least; and the cautious prudence of the farmers defeats its own purpose: for were they all to resolve to give their labourers higher wages, and assist them when it was in their power, by letting off small portions of land, they would in the end be gainers by the gradual diminution of the poor rates, which in many parishes press so heavily upon the landholder. Nor is this a mere visionary speculation; for in some places where this plan has been acted upon, the result has been most beneficial, the rates considerably diminished, and consequently the farmer materially benefited; whilst the labourer, having so great a spur to his industry, naturally falls into more regular habits, and the prospect of employing his own children upon the cultivation of the land allotted to him is another source of pride and comfort. With these aids, and the introduction of small clubs, much, I am convinced, might be done towards bringing back those feelings of independence which once were the pride of the English cottager.

The late Sir Thomas Barnard, a man of most benevolent habits, and who paid great attention to the means of ameliorating the distresses of the poor, published some years ago an account of the great advantages of penny clubs, of which, I believe, he was the first inventor; and the good effects they had

produced in the north, where they had been established on a very large scale. Upon perusing his very valuable book this was so evident, that I determined to attempt something of the same kind in this village; the result, I can confidently say, has been of great benefit to many; and I believe and hope it will be of service to give an account of the manner and plan the writer has adopted with such perfect success.

Amidst the many and various wants of the aged poor, there are few things that can contribute so much to their necessary comfort as warmth, and the gift of blankets is generally one of the donations, which, as winter approaches, the humane and considerate often bestow, either from associations, or from individual bounty; but still these gifts can only extend to a *certain* degree; and many a poor and aged fellow-creature, when the storm is beating against his cottage, and the wind blowing round him, creeps to his hard bed cold and cheerless, with only the remnants of a tattered blanket to cover him! and he rises shivering the next morning, with the first dawn of day, to cower over a few lighted sticks that he has crawled out to collect.

Now to a person of this description (and to how many in a large village, in spite of occasional bounty, does this apply?) the establishment of blanket clubs points out an easy and independent mode to the poor individual, of having, by a small weekly contribution, this pressing want relieved; and that they all resort to it with the greatest eagerness, and have, with very few exceptions, been punctual in their payment, the writer has fully experienced. The mode adopted is a very simple one. I have the names of the applicants inserted in a list: when the numbers are equal to the quantity of blankets that are provided, notice is given that the club is full; but so anxious have I found all the poor to belong to it, that applications are made frequently *many* months

before the time, to insure their being members of it. The rules are few and simple. On the day that the blankets are distributed, each individual makes a deposit of sixpence, and upon paying this receives a blanket; and every week they are to bring two-pence till the sum is paid: if they are irregular in the payment, or after the first few weeks cease to bring their money, the blanket is forfeited, and it is let out upon the same terms to another; however this has never happened but in *one* instance, the money being regularly brought to me every Monday morning. The blankets that I generally purchased are strong Witney ones, and cost twelve or thirteen shillings a pair. As the clubs the writer has established always commence upon New Year's Day, the payment is generally completed three months before that period: by this means the subscribers have some little resting time. According to my rules, no person can belong two successive years to the *same* club, but they have the liberty of belonging to the others I have established, and the second year they may return again to the blanket club; by this means the benefit is more widely diffused, and they get useful articles almost imperceptibly to themselves; and many an idle penny, instead of being thrown away in an ale-house is saved up for a better purpose.

The writer has also, with the same success, established two other clubs, one for *Sheets*, and the other for warm *Cloth Cloaks*. As these articles cost more than the single blanket, and as it is necessary, to prevent confusion, that the money should be paid within the year, the deposit upon the cloak is one shilling, and the weekly payment two-pence half-penny. I have found these clubs equally popular, and they have proved of the highest comfort to the subscriber. A warm thick cloak costs eleven shillings; very few poor people can afford to expend at once so much upon one article, but the shilling deposit and weekly payment the very poorest person can

contrive *with management* to scrape together, and they reap the advantage of their economy by *immediate possession*. This proves a greater stimulus, than if the money were all to be collected before they were put in possession of the article they had subscribed for. Sheets are things I have found the poor very anxious to possess; and indeed the applications that were made for them *far exceeded* the number I could conveniently appropriate: they are given in *pairs*, that they might have a *change*, the luxury of *two sheets* in the bed *at once* being almost unknown amongst the poor.

I now proceed to speak of the *Penny Clubs* — they are upon a different plan. I have confined them for the use of children who are put to school by the bounty of individuals; to them, therefore, the contribution of a penny a week is not felt; and the small sum of four shillings and fourpence, at the end of the year, *well laid out*, gives them a change of linen, which they make up themselves, under the direction of their mistress at school. When each member has chosen what he most wants, I buy all the materials, and have them cut out. By good management in the cutting out, and the advantage that arises by buying a large stock of materials at once, the yearly payment of four shillings and fourpence will frequently furnish *two shirts, a pair of stockings, and a cravat*, for a boy of twelve years old; and a girl of the same age gets a *shift, a petticoat, and stockings*. If they choose to have more articles, and the sum is exceeded, they pay in the extra money. The writer has established a rule never to *give* any thing towards the clubs, that the poor *may feel* that what they gain has been *entirely* by their own little savings; and this rule need not in the *smallest* degree prove a check to charitable donations, which can be bestowed in *various* ways, without interfering with the little independency of a penny a week; for if the poor man thinks it will be paid for him, he feels no longer

any interest in making the exertion of putting by his weekly mite for this useful purpose.

In this neighbourhood, and close to one of the park gates of Bowood, there is a school-house, built by the Marquis of Lansdowne, and supported entirely by the bounty of the Marchioness: it consists of seventy-two children. Boys and girls are instructed together, upon Pool's improved village plan. As many of the children of our parishioners are permitted to share in the bounty of this benevolent institution, the writer has attended much to the establishment, and introduced, by the permission of the Marchioness, a penny club into her school. Of course it is optional; but those parents who wish their children to belong to it, give in their names to the mistress, and she transmits the money to me, generally once in six weeks, but it is paid to her every Monday morning. At the end of each year, Lady Lansdowne gives to the girls bonnets, cloaks, gowns, tippets, and stockings; to the boys, jackets, smock-frocks, hats, cravats, and stockings. The penny club furnishes shirts, shifts, or any other article they may fix upon; and as it is all cut out for them, and made at the school, they get *completely clothed*, without *feeling* that they have expended any thing for the purpose. I can generally judge what habits the parents are of, by the anxious desire they express to avail themselves of the advantages the club holds out to them, and by their steady and regular payment; whilst, on the other hand, those who do not wish their children to be members of it, the writer has almost *invariably* found to be of careless and improvident habits, not regarding their little ones being in rags, so as they can have a few spare pence to throw away at the alehouse, or expend upon tobacco or snuff.

At a small school of my own, a penny club is also introduced; and I have another upon a larger scale, which admits all those girls who have been educated at my expense. The number of this club is unlimited;

and I have found, from the frequent solicitations which have been made for *others* to enter into it, who have not been at my school, how very advantageous it has proved. However, I still continue to confine the club for my girls exclusively, and never in one instance has there been any *default* in payment. When the time comes for the purchases to be made, many of the young women choose articles that cost double their club money, which they invariably pay; and the delight they express when they assemble at the parsonage to receive their things, is most gratifying to my feelings, and amply rewards me for all the trouble I have taken upon their account. The writer has been led to state all these minute particulars, in the hope that the same plans may be acted upon with the same success in other villages. Many people give largely to the poor, but *shrink* from encountering any personal trouble. To those, therefore, this account will afford no interest; but to others who have active habits, leisure,—a *strong desire* to do good, with means of providing for the wants of their poor neighbours,—it may be gratifying to adopt measures that I have found to have been of the highest service in every point of view.

The reader will smile, perhaps, if I speak of the necessity of economy amongst those who have barely sufficient for their subsistence; but often, amidst the most appalling poverty, wasteful and improvident habits exist, and the children frequently want bread, when the father is drinking away his little all at the alehouse. Many instances of this kind have come under my knowledge; of course these all show how much the cottager may better his own hard lot by regular and attentive habits, and these habits are strengthened by belonging to clubs such as I have described. I have often visited two cottages in this village, the inhabitants of which form a striking contrast to each other, and fully prove how much poverty may be softened by regular and active exertions. Both are

poor, both with families, receiving the same pay from the parish, in short in *every respect* upon equal terms in regard to worldly means ; but what a difference presents itself when you enter their cottages ! One, dark and dismal ; the mother in rags, surrounded by a group of children, whose features are disguised by dirt ; the windows broken, and stuffed up with old shreds. The little furniture that you see in this miserable abode is scattered here and there in broken fragments ; and the small patch of ground before the house is made a mere receptacle for the litter and dirt which is only occasionally swept out from the cottage : But let us turn to the abode of the other poor family : the hand of industry is there, and mark how cheering are its effects ! The house is old, like the other, yet wearing an air of comfort from the cleanliness that surrounds it ; the floor is nicely swept : the children employed in assisting their mother—with clean and smiling faces—their clothes not hanging about them in rags, but showing the industry of the parent in the patches which appear upon them ; the cups and saucers, of the meanest sort, no doubt, and some of them broken, are arranged to the best advantage upon the shelf,—the small garden before the house is dug up for culinary purposes, and here and there a flower is springing up, which always gives an air of cheerfulness to the cottager's dwelling, and bespeaks a mind at peace with itself, and contented with the humble lot in which it has pleased God to place him.

THE END.

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